

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Minnesota State vs Minnesota

Thursday, April 7, 2022

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

Minnesota State Mavericks

Mike Hastings

Benton Maass

Reggie Lutz

Dryden McKay

Semifinal Postgame Media Conference



Yeah, it is what it is. Puck took a bounce. All that was really going through my head is that would have been a huge save if I would have made it, momentum builder. Didn't really seem to matter for the guys. We stuck with it. Eventually we were rewarded.

Q. Any of the players, it seemed like half the town of Mankato was in the stands tonight. What did it mean to have that many people in the stands cheering you on?

REGGIE LUTZ: Yeah, it was awesome. Mankato is really not obviously as big of a city as Minneapolis. It was great to see the kind of turnout we had for us. It means a lot. Even when we first got here, walking on the red carpet, kind of gave us chills, all of our fans and family there. It was really something special. I know we built a lot of energy off of that.

BENTON MAASS: Yeah, I mean, like Reggie said, even from coming in on the red carpet, you could see there was a lot of energy there. A lot of it was from Mankato fans, which was really cool. It was nice to kind of have them there in the corner. Obviously they were loud and stuff. Having the band there, it was a really exciting atmosphere for us for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Did you high five anybody?

MIKE HASTINGS: I found my wife, yes (laughter). I did.

So you know what, this has been impressive really from start to where we're at right now. I want to thank Boston. I want to thank -- being back, when I heard the crowd being announced, 17,000-plus, all these young men having an opportunity to play in that type of an environment is something pretty special.

It's nice to be a part of this, post COVID, have them have an opportunity that they have.

Q. I believe that was the first time you guys have trailed in a while. It's the first time in the tournament that you've been behind. What was that like being behind?

Minnesota State 5, Minnesota 1

THE MODERATOR: Here come the Mavericks. Congratulations, guys.

Coach, congratulations. Maybe after you take a sip of water, you can kick us off with your thoughts on the game, please.

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, first of all, not exactly the start we wanted, giving up a 2-1 hole. Kind of hoping Dryden was going to be able to pull the bacon out of the fire, it didn't happen. They got off to a good start. We had talked about that being a very important piece for us.

I thought we played a very good first period even though we were down. The guys did a really good job of just sticking with it. There wasn't a lot of panic on the bench or in the locker room. As they have this entire season, they stuck with it and they were rewarded for it.

It was a good effort for us. We're excited to have an opportunity to play for a national championship.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players, please.

Q. Dryden, when is the last time you faced a 2-0? Does your D say any kind of apology to you after things go terribly wrong?

DRYDEN MCKAY: I couldn't tell you the last time I faced a two-on-one on a game. Wish I could have come up with it. I think we do enough of them in practice.

DRYDEN MCKAY: Yeah, I mean, I think the last time we were behind was probably up in Bemidji in the conference championship. It's not like it's unfamiliar to us. There are plenty of games this year where the other team scored first and we still had to find a way.

We're a mature group. It doesn't really seem to matter to us whether we're up or down. We keep fighting, keep playing our game, eventually we get rewarded.

Q. Reggie, this team, you really play like a team. I'm just curious how long it took to get that buy-in, to get to that level where you can have a performance like tonight on such an important stage?

REGGIE LUTZ: I think it's right when you step foot on campus. Ever since coach has been here in Mankato he's built a great culture of family, team first. Anything that gets thrown our way, you're going to put our team first. We don't have one selfish guy on our team. That's kind of our MO. Whoever is playing great that night is going to get some more playing time maybe than the other guy, and the other guy that's not played as much is still going to be cheering us on, staying positive. That's just kind of what our culture is. "We before me."

I think tonight we didn't have the start we wanted. Everybody was kind of bought in, we looked at each other, we didn't want our season to end tonight. We knew what had to be done.

Q. Reggie, the wraparound goal, I understand in Elk River that's a big deal, you can earn a breakfast. How long have you been practicing that? Have there been any Happy Meals in your life?

REGGIE LUTZ: Feel like you've talked to my dad about that. It's funny you bring that up, because when I was younger, every time I would score a wraparound goal, my dad would take me to McDonald's and I'd get a Happy Meal. I've been working on one for a while and it was pretty cool to see it work on the big stage. Like I said, ever since I was probably five, I've been practicing wraparound goals. It was able to pay off tonight, so it was pretty cool.

Q. Benton, except for the one hiccup, you threw a blanket over an incredibly talented team. We could see the frustration. What was the thrust of what you guys were trying to do to keep them from having any chances?

BENTON MAASS: Yeah, I think when you look at our defense, it's not just the six guys that are labeled as it on the score sheet. It's a team defense. I thought our

forwards did a really, really good job of coming back on the back-check tonight and picking up late guys. That allowed us to stay up on our gaps and force a lot of dump-ins rather than rushes, which is something we kind of pride ourselves in trying to end the rush at the blue line. I think we did a good job with that tonight.

Like I said, it was definitely a team effort on defense starting with Dryden and working our way out.

Q. Dryden, as satisfying as it is to get to a championship game, how much is it also to beat the Gophers to get there? If you look at over all the decades, they're the first team people, especially outside Minnesota, think of?

DRYDEN MCKAY: Yeah, for sure. Like you said, they're the first team people think of. They always will be.

Yeah, I think it's kind of a cherry on top to beat them. It didn't really matter who we were playing tonight. We played the way we wanted to play. We're confident anytime we do that, doesn't matter who's on the other side, we're going to come out on top.

Q. Following up on limiting offensive chances for the Gophers, how did your neutral zone play in defense build your offense? For the players, especially Benton and Reggie.

BENTON MAASS: I mean, I think you could see the ice was a little bit chippy out there. Going into the game, we just kind of had a mindset of using as much banks as we could, getting pucks deep.

I think the simple play was definitely the right play tonight. At times you don't want to get too flashy, especially when the puck is bouncing out there. I think that was big for us tonight, just using our indirect chips and letting our forwards get into the offensive zone. That's kind of where we got our bread and butter tonight, so...

Q. For any of the players. Coach was talking about your response to giving up the early lead. I feel like after what you went through with the CCHA tournament, it's kind of like you've been through that adversity before. I don't know. What was it like for you guys? I feel like you already probably have gone through the most adversity you're going to face.

BENTON MAASS: Yeah, I mean, I don't think you'll ever see something like that again in college hockey. I mean, that's definitely an event that can prepare you for just about anything, whether that be in hockey or life I guess.

We were pretty calm in the locker room, especially after the first period. We had a lot of vocal guys like Furry, Wyatt, Jack. They were talking us up. I mean, the locker room presence was a pretty calm one after the first. We'd been in that position before. We were pretty confident going into the second that we could generate a lot more shots, beat this goalie.

We were pretty confident, for sure.

Q. Dryden and Mike, the third and fourth lines were fantastic all night. Talk about the impact they made on the game tonight, and also throughout the tournament.

DRYDEN MCKAY: Yeah, I think you know that I think the third and fourth line is what has made us special so far in the postseason. They've created that depth that makes us so balanced and so hard to match up with for other teams.

You look at a guy like Will Hillman who's played probably less than 10 games this year. He stepped right in, I thought he was one of our best team. It seemed like anybody we put in the lineup is ready to go. We have to have that if you want to win championships.

THE MODERATOR: Hasty, we'll come back to you on that.

Q. Benton, can you sort of walk us through what you were seeing on the ice on your goal, the mindset after getting that breakthrough?

BENTON MAASS: Lucas Sowder made a pretty good play to get the puck down low to me. Kind of did a little shoulder check and saw I had more time and space than I thought. Was able to get to the side of the net. Coach is a big preacher on if we get there, it's got to go to the net. I kind of just threw it on net and hoped for a rebound because I knew we had guys in front. Fortunately it was able to go in the far side.

Q. Benton or Reggie, McLaughlin and Perbix are a couple other upriver guys. Have you grown up with those guys? Any kind of bragging rights from this one? Benton, did you get to go to McDonald's, too, if you had wraparounds?

BENTON MAASS: I didn't score too much back then (smiling).

Actually, yeah, I grew up playing with both of them, I'm best friends with Jack and his older brother Nick. I've been around the rink a lot with them. Obviously Blake, too, in our youth. He moved away unfortunately.

Both great kids on and off the ice. It was definitely fun to be able to go out there and compete against those guys.

REGGIE LUTZ: Yeah, kind of echoing what Ben said. Obviously they're great human beings. I think Ben is a little bit closer than I am with them. They're just great people. Hope for the best for those two.

Q. Dryden, you get so laser focused on the task at hand, thinking nothing but Gophers. Have you in the last 20 minutes stopped and thought about what's going to happen Saturday night, the opportunity you have earned for yourselves?

DRYDEN MCKAY: Yes and no. I think it's crossed my mind, but at this point right now I'm just ready to get back to the hotel, enjoy this one, see my family, stuff like that, and then wake up tomorrow and get focused on that Saturday night game.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thanks very much. Congratulations. We'll let you go. See you tomorrow.

Hasty, can you go back to the third and fourth line question.

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, I'll echo a little bit of what Dryden had said. Ondrej Pavel and David Silve have been impactful players for us over the last month. Ondrej has been probably one of our most impactful forwards whether you're talking five-on-five, killing penalties. Those guys allow us to play with depth. When you can play with depth, you can spread out your minutes. That keeps both sides of that, your top six, your bottom six, fresh. It allows them to hopefully play the game the right way.

Those guys have been really impactful players for us whether it's taking faceoffs, killing penalties, or as you saw tonight, chipping in offensively.

Q. You mentioned how much you liked the first period despite being down by a goal. What was your message to the players in the locker room?

MIKE HASTINGS: Just that. I just said, Hey, you know what, we've got to stick with it. I thought we had done a pretty good job at possessing the puck and defending. We made a mistake. That happens.

I thought the guys just flushed it and moved on. So I'm fortunate to have a group of leaders in that locker room that do a lot of the coaching. They manage themselves. So they've made it easy on myself.

Q. Was wondering your initial thoughts about the

matchup with Denver.

MIKE HASTINGS: They're good. Everybody saw it tonight. I've seen it multiple times just because where I'm from and them being in the NCHC, I witnessed some of their games during the season.

They're deep, they're talented, very good goaltending. I think they're about as thorough a coaching staff as there is in college hockey right now.

So to me it's going to be a difficult task. But as Dryden said, you know what, we'll get to that when the sun comes up tomorrow. We're going to try and enjoy this one a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: It's actually tomorrow right now, Hasty (laughter).

MIKE HASTINGS: Just saw that (smiling).

Q. After they got the first goal, it seemed like your defensemen were more engaged, more active. Was that kind of by design or is that just something that they saw going in the flow of the game and just took upon themselves to be more active?

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, I think our game, as well as really -- whether you want to talk Denver, you talk other programs that are having success this year, you need all five guys playing offense, you need all five guys playing defense.

Hopefully our players feel confident enough if somebody gets down below the goal line, they happen to be a defenseman, one of our high forwards is going to be able to cover for them. We don't want them to be uncomfortable in that spot.

Again, I just thought it's something that we work on a lot, as I'm sure a lot of teams do. It benefited us tonight.

Q. The last time you guys played Denver, I think it was only your 10th game at the helm of Minnesota State. In that season, you look back at that inaugural year, did you believe there was going to be a time in the future that you would be playing on a stage like you'll be playing on Saturday night?

MIKE HASTINGS: No. To be honest, no (smiling).

George did a pretty good job of making me think we weren't going to win a game (laughter), let alone get to this stage. So, you know, going all the way back to that beginning, it seems like forever ago.

You learn from the hard things. That was a hard weekend. I remember it vividly. I thought we played well that weekend, and we didn't get a point.

We'll see. We'll take a kick at the can on Saturday.

Q. Mike, has it set in yet what this might mean, not just to your team but the city of Mankato, too?

MIKE HASTINGS: Well, to look across the rink and see the contingent that traveled across the country to come and support us, walking out on that red carpet after the players had gone through, seeing the passion from those people that have really been there for us for quite some time now, they've made our building a difficult place to go and play. They've been with us this entire season.

Coming out of COVID, you never know what you're going to get. We've just got a lot of very passionate people that have supported us for a while. It was great to be able to pay them back a little bit tonight for them committing to spending the money and coming out and supporting us.

THE MODERATOR: Hasty, thanks very much. Appreciate it. Mike will be back here tomorrow for more questions.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports