

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Minnesota State vs Denver

Friday, April 8, 2022

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

Minnesota State Mavericks

Mike Hastings

Ryan Sandelin

Ondrej Pavel

Benton Maass

Finals Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Afternoon, guys.

Who would like to start with questions?

Q. For any of the players or Mike, what have you done in your free time in Boston? Have you taken the T and have you gotten lost?

RYAN SANDELIN: No. We've honestly just kind of been hanging out as a team, enjoying each other at the hotel. Just a special moment to be here and share this with this group of guys. I think just getting to enjoy that together is what we're focused on right now.

THE MODERATOR: Benton, do you know what the T is?

BENTON MAASS: Yeah, I've been on the East Coast for a little bit. I know what's T is. Yeah, so... Haven't gotten lost on it yet.

THE MODERATOR: Ondrej, is there a T in Prague?

ONDREJ PAVEL: Is it like a subway?

THE MODERATOR: Yeah.

ONDREJ PAVEL: A little bit less confusing, I dare to say (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Hasty, you high-five'd your wife. What about the T?

MIKE HASTINGS: My son goes to Northeastern. He educated me a little bit. We've gotten on the T. Just been

educated.

Q. Benton, Durham is about an hour from here, I understand. With your experience in hockey east, are you the local guide out here? Talk about the decision to go to New Hampshire and then come back to Minnesota.

BENTON MAASS: Yeah, had a unique opportunity to be able to go out and play four years out there right after high school, which was a great time. I consider it a second home, definitely.

Then with COVID hitting, we kind of got word we might be getting another year of eligibility. I had had talks kind of already with the Mankato staff the first time around, being recruited. Those talks kind of picked up when I went to the transfer portal again. It kind of all fit into place.

I had a good Zoom with Coach Hastings. I think I committed to him about 20 minutes later. It all went pretty quick.

I couldn't be more happier with the decision, the ability to get to play in the last game of the year tomorrow.

Q. Mike, two of the best offenses in the country, top offenses. It feels like after last night's game, both of these teams are almost more prepared to play great defense. Talk about why that has to prevail in a tournament like this.

MIKE HASTINGS: Well, first of all, what you do with the puck is one thing, but it's just as important what you're doing without the puck so you can get it back.

Both teams, you watch Denver, watching the amount of tape that we have, they're about as detailed a team that I've seen with their sticks, getting back on top. What they did last night, yesterday late afternoon, to an incredibly talented Michigan team, last night when we got behind in the game, I thought it was still really important that we continue to defend so they didn't extend the lead, then when we didn't have the puck get it back so we could get on offense.

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

I just think there's two sides of the game. You have to be committed to both sides of that I think to be effective at this time. That's why I think both teams moved on with the opportunity for Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, what time did you shut her down? A late night last night.

BENTON MAASS: Not much sleep, unfortunately. Get a nap in today, we'll be ready to go.

Q. Mike, with the transfer portal, how much does that change your job? How much do you and your coaching staff spend on things like that?

MIKE HASTINGS: You know what, I think that's ever-evolving. Right now as we've asked the young men to be focused on what's going on today, they are. We have to continue to do that while we're keeping an eye on what's going on in the portal because there's other teams involved in that right now.

We've been blessed, you can see the impact that Benton has had, David Silye, Josh Groll. All three of these young men have had an impact on our program in a short period of time. Think that has to do with the makeup of the human beings and the young men themselves. They've come in with the idea we're going to earn everything we get.

I just think the portal is continuing to become more and more part of processes of structuring the roster. Now, we've got our own philosophies on what we're going to do with that. Hopefully we can stay true to those. But I do think we need to continue to be flexible in our mindset of what's going to happen moving forward.

Q. You nearly have 20-odd straight wins. Is there a science or rhythm to it when you're going through a game, even if it's avoiding a loss rather than picking up a win, where it's started generating good vibes? Is there a specific science and rhythm how you have to approach that as you continue winning?

RYAN SANDELIN: I don't really think any of the guys have thought about the streak at all. I think we're just focused on playing a good 60 minutes every time we play.

There hasn't really been any chatter at all about kind of the streak we're on. We're focused on playing good hockey and to our identity. I think we've done that consistently for a while now. We need that to continue if we want to have success on Saturday, so...

THE MODERATOR: Ondrej?

ONDREJ PAVEL: I believe the big part of making sure that every single game we just give it 100%, and our ability to win hockey games is a big part of that. Even it happen yesterday, we went down 0-1 and there was no panic, just confidence in the details we are good at: just keeping to our game. If we do that, we will be successful, we will win hockey games.

THE MODERATOR: Hasty?

MIKE HASTINGS: Again, I'm relying on the group that's inside those walls. I will say this. There is a difference when you're playing towards the end of your season and it's a Friday or a Saturday night, and you know you're not packing your bags if it doesn't go well. There's a definite difference there.

But I will tell you, I'll echo Ryan, he's being real honest, I haven't heard it. I haven't heard our guys talk about it. When we sat down with the leadership group, planning our week, what we're going to do, that really hasn't come up whether it be through the coaches or with the players.

They've done a good job of continuing to turn the page and moving on to the next one. That's what I think they're planning on doing Saturday.

Q. Benton, how cool is it with everything else going on on the ice that you're maybe going to get see Dryden win the Hobey Baker award? A great cherry on top of everything this weekend knowing how important he is to you guys as a team.

BENTON MAASS: Dryden, he means everything to this team and this program. Not only is he the best goalie in college hockey, he might be one of the most humble guys in college hockey. Comes to the rink with the same attitude no matter what's going on. He and the other two goalies go out and compete in every practice, every game. It's crazy what he brings to the team, to the community especially.

There's always a little extra roar at the rink once Dryden's game gets called. He's worked for everything that he's gotten throughout his college career. It's been an absolute pleasure being able to play for him this year.

THE MODERATOR: Hasty, what is the schedule like for today?

MIKE HASTINGS: The guys are here. They should be here by now. We're going to go out for a little loop-and-shoot for probably 20, 25 minutes, get a drip. I

know the guys don't want any coaching going on. We'll try to stay out of the way, let them get their work in, then get back to the hotel. The staff's got some work to do. These guys have got some rest to get.

Also want them to be able to get back and spend some time with their families and some friends. Not too much of it, but there's a lot of people that have taken the time and spent a lot of money to come out and support these young men. We want to give them a little bit of that time. When they get their heads off the pillow tomorrow, be really focused on what's going to happen Saturday.

Q. Ryan, I noticed at the end of your off-ice warmup, you threw your hats in the middle. I know that's what you did during the delay in the CCHH championship game. Is that something that started with that? Talk about that game galvanizing your team, helping you deal with adversity.

RYAN SANDELIN: No, that's just something we all kind of do. I don't know. That started before I was here. Everybody just loves to that fun, that circle before we break off for on-ice warmup.

Yeah, I think that game really helped us yesterday. The game goes into overtime, it's kind of something, we're all warmed up, kind of waiting for that game to end. Kind of a similar situation. We just had to keep our heads focused and relax and be ready to go for whenever that game was going to end.

I felt like it translated. We started well, didn't get the first goal, but I felt like we were playing good hockey through the first 20 minutes. That's a testament to the group for staying dialed and being ready to go when the puck dropped.

Q. Mike, several schools, Wisconsin, Gophers come to mind, won their first title here. What would it mean for you to win in a place that basically has been synonymous with college hockey for over a hundred years?

MIKE HASTINGS: First of all, again, I told you my son goes to Northeastern. When we came out, visiting some places, David Quinn was still at BU. Take my son, when we came out and played Princeton. We visited Harvard, BU, BC. To see the history, even Northeastern, the history of the game, what it's meant, being from Minnesota, seeing some teams come out this direction and be successful, it would mean everything for this program just because the work that these young men have put in from day one till today.

Boston has been good to us so far. I can tell you when we were out at Worcester, quite a few -- even Providence, it wasn't quite as kind (smiling), but we're trying to learn from those bumps in the road.

This journey has been phenomenal with this group from start to where we're at today. But we've still got some work to do.

THE MODERATOR: Worcester. That sounded pretty good.

MIKE HASTINGS: I'm getting there. I'm getting there (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, your dad give you the scouting report on Denver yet?

RYAN SANDELIN: Not really. I've watched a couple games, though.

Q. I actually remember that game at Princeton.

MIKE HASTINGS: Absolutely.

Q. Anyway, Ryan, what is it kind of like for you to be on the opposite side of the dynamic? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you were in Buffalo with your dad. Being there, cheering him on last year, now where he's like watching you play, what has that dynamic been like for you guys?

RYAN SANDELIN: It's really special. He doesn't get a lot of opportunities to watch me play. I kind of use it as a motivator for myself to play at the highest level because I only get so many opportunities in the year where he's in the standings.

I think just being back in Boston, it's the first Frozen Four he ever made it to. I was a little kid, that was really special. That's the first memory I have of Bulldog hockey. To be back in this setting doing it all over again is kind of full circle. Be here as a fan, be here as a family, just enjoy it for what it is.

Q. Ondrej, your parents are here to watch you from Prague this weekend. How special is that? When is the last time they've gotten to see you play, at all this year?

ONDREJ PAVEL: I believe the last time my mom saw me play was at the World Juniors way back in 2020. It's unbelievable for me. They spent a huge amount of money to come over here and watch me play. Especially I haven't seen them since I got into college. I'm a sophomore now

so it's been almost two years.

It's great to see how much fun they're having in the stands, talking to the other parents, Mankato supporters. I'm just glad I could be the conduit of that fun and I hope I make them proud.

THE MODERATOR: Have you been to Prague? If you haven't, a pretty neat place.

ONDREJ PAVEL: Support the tourism (laughter).

Q. The Saturday of the championship game I've heard can be a long day. You want to go, get out there and play. How do you manage that knowing what could be out there at the end but trying to stay doing what you need to do from getting up to when you get out for warmup?

MIKE HASTINGS: The first thing I'll say is yesterday was a long day. I've had some pretty good guys, Sandelin being one of them, talking to different guys that have been at a Frozen Four, then getting to that Saturday game and asking them their experiences.

Even our commissioner, Don Lucia, talking about what happens. A lot of things they discuss is those long days. With us playing the late game yesterday, having the overtime, somebody mentioned in this we played the noon game, which is difficult for us. The guys have been pretty adapted. They've done a really good job at just managing what's in front of them.

We backed some things off yesterday, when we got up, just to try to get as normal as we could get. Today, again, we'll get them some rest after a little skate, but then try to get back into the rhythm of what we do in a game even though it's going to be a little bit later.

THE MODERATOR: What is a good start time, Mr. McDonald's Happy Meal?

BENTON MAASS: For me (laughter)?

I'm a big fan of the later game. 7:00. It's kind of nice. The game is at 8 tomorrow, but that's 7 central time, so kind of on par with what we're used to.

THE MODERATOR: Ondrej, what time do you want to start?

ONDREJ PAVEL: It doesn't matter. I know this team will be ready no matter what time. Everyone on this team has gone through every possible situations. We played in the midget hockey where we have to be at the rink at 6 or 7 in

the morning. We grew up slowly pushing the game time later.

I believe we have played this game for so long, everyone has their core habits, that if they go through them, they will be ready for the game.

I have the utter most confidence in my teammates that everyone will be ready no matter what time we play.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, do you care what time we're playing?

RYAN SANDELIN: Nope (smiling).

Q. Mike, I was thinking back to 10 years ago, at Tampa at the Frozen Four, speculation about who was going to get the Mankato job. A decade for you. Was this part of a timeline? Did you have any detailed thought laid out as to what stages your program would take? How does being in the national championship game 10 years later fit with your plan?

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, I don't think there's for us on our side of the business ever a plan that's longer than, you know, the year you're in. Now again, I know the administration doesn't want to hear that. You're supposed to build for long periods.

When I sat down with Kevin Buisman and our administration at the beginning, we were going to try to build something that was sustainable, that we could try to continue to build on year in and year out, surrounded by great people.

I've talked about Todd Knott, Darren Blue, who was with us for nine years, now Paul Kirtland. They've done a really good job at allowing us to be sustainable because we're recruiting young men like up here at the table right now.

I can't say there was a plan. You look at it as a coach, you get a contract, you're hoping they look at you sometime during that or towards the end of it and say, Okay, this is going in a pretty good direction, we'll give you another one.

You kind of do the same thing that you do with the players. You live daily, monthly, yearly, then move on after that year is done into the next one.

THE MODERATOR: We'll finish up with the players because they have to practice.

Q. For the players, we talked about that long wait to get the puck drop tomorrow. As you walk out of the tunnel, what's the main thought in your head as you

get out there to play for a national championship?

ONDREJ PAVEL: Keep to our identity, like just do what we do, make sure we skate, mainly enjoy the moment. I believe that we have the confidence in us. If we just do what we do, what we have done the entire season, we'll be fine.

BENTON MAASS: Yeah, I think it goes back to what Ondrej just said. It's playing the game we've played all year. We know that's what's going to make us successful. Even though we're going up a really skilled Denver team, I certainly like how we match up. I think our guys are going to be extremely focused and ready to go for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll have the Maverick Machine tomorrow for the band tomorrow.

Q. Benton, obviously you're new to this program this year. What has been the difference in this team? What makes this team so special compared to one that was struggling that you were in?

BENTON MAASS: We came out here, we all went down to Mankato last summer to work out together for five weeks. I think even from that time on, the attitude in the room was a little different. I certainly think that comes from the culture that the players before me and Coach Hastings have built.

It just revolves year in and year out as more guys come in, they get acclimated to what the program means to the state, what the program means to the city of Mankato and the students here. I think that's just been the biggest thing, is the attitude in the locker room, the support we get throughout the community.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, we'll let you go. Got to get ready for practice. Thank you very much and best of luck tomorrow night.

We will continue on with questions for Coach Hastings.

Q. Mike, when you look at Denver on tape, what do you see as the one, two biggest challenges that you know you're going to have to deal with tomorrow night?

MIKE HASTINGS: Their ability to transition the puck. They do a really good job defending, as I mentioned earlier. Then their ability from their back end to get the puck from their stick up to their forwards, then getting up and supporting it.

They play with a lot of confidence. They like to possess the puck when they get inside the offensive zone. You

look at the goal that was scored the other day in overtime, created turnover, getting to the corner, they attacked the net.

They're substance-based. They've got depth. I just think they have a certain swagger about them when they get a puck. They pursue it when they don't have it.

We're going to have to go out and make plays against this team knowing that that team is going to defend with an attitude. So there's a reason they're playing on Saturday, and it's because they're good.

Q. I admit, I haven't had the pleasure of being to Mankato. What does this team mean to that community?

MIKE HASTINGS: You know what, I'm from northern Minnesota. When I grew up, you thought hockey died in the Twin Cities. It wasn't anywhere south of that. As I went to high school and played junior hockey down in Rochester, then in Austin, Minnesota, which is in the southern part of the state, same city that Bobby Motzko is from.

What I've seen over the last 10 years is just a growth, all the way from our grassroots. We hosted Hockey Day in Minnesota, which I mentioned. The one thing that was really unique about that is I think there were over 60 teams, youth involved, that were able to go skate on that ice sheet outdoor. With what the Minnesota Wild has done in integrating everybody in the state, not just the Iron Range, not just the Twin Cities, but the southern part of the state, awarding our local organizing committee an opportunity to show ourselves, then that committee stepping up, knocking it out of the park as far as providing an environment for everybody, men, women, girls, boys, everybody in the community, to enjoy a little piece of what this great game brings in our state en masse.

I just think it continues to grow and it's on a course that's going north. I think there's a lot of people benefiting from it. You're seeing our youth numbers grow from Mites all the way up.

I just think when you can become part of the fiber of the community at growing a game like that, everybody can enjoy. Our building has become a place that people come to gather and then there's a hockey game there, which I think is pretty unique.

Q. I wanted to cycle back to Ryan talking about growing up, his first memory being from the Bulldogs. What is it like as a coach recruiting a player? What are those conversations like? In Minnesota you're



recruiting a coach's son to play. What are those conversations like and how does that develop?

MIKE HASTINGS: Pretty unique situation here right now. You got Don Lucia in the back of the room. I sat in Don's living room recruiting his son Tony. I learned at that time it's more important to recruit the mother (laughter). In both instances, I figured out, tried to read the rube a little bit, I went to the moms.

It was no different with Ryan. My assistants have been doing a great job, as they do, at identifying quality players. They kept banging the drum for Ryan. We were all under the assumption that he was probably going to be a Bulldog.

Finally they gave it enough in our recruiting meetings, Are you going to call him or we? I gave him a call. I said, Sandy, I want to ask you something. Is he going to be a Bulldog or not?

He goes, You know what, I think he wants to do his own thing.

That's when I said, Is it okay if I call Wendy?

She came on the visit. I was fortunate. Scott gave me an opportunity I think in '05 when he was the World Junior coach in Grand Forks. I worked with David Quinn there. Ryan, I don't know how old he was, he wasn't very old. He was around that tournament the whole time. I was able to get to know that family.

As you said, the hockey community is so small, you cross paths a lot. When we knew there was an opportunity that he was going to look elsewhere other than Bulldog country, we went all in.

Wendy came on the visit. As you can tell, he's a pretty special young man. I'm a big believer in coach's kids because they grow up in that environment and they understand there's some good things to it, there's some bad things to it, hard things that you have to be accountable, it's okay to be accountable and hold people that way. We've been blessed to have Ryan as part of our program.

Q. A number of guys have already left early from other programs to go to the pros. We expect Michigan and the Gophers may lose a number of guys. What kind of benefit has it been to you that you don't have a whole lot of draftees? You are probably going to have the same in November.

MIKE HASTINGS: I think that's changing a little bit only because of the free agency window. Somebody comes in,

I've had to answer this before, when a kid is drafted, he's got to deal with one team. A free agent, we're getting to 32. Do they have a spot for him? Are they willing to clear a spot for him?

We've been dealing with that here over the last few years where on a yearly basis we have free agents with the opportunity to sign NHL contracts. Really it's the open line of communication. They're the ones driving the bus. We need to be there to help them in that decision-making process.

At the end of the day it's pretty difficult to look at a young man and tell him he can't go chase his dream. It's about educating them about what's out there, support them with whatever decision they make.

Q. Talking to a couple other coaches in the CCHA about your team, everybody brought up kind of the same theme, saying they hadn't played an opponent all year that had so much buy-in top to bottom from the roster. I'm sure that didn't start this year. Was there a leadership group in the past where you felt like this turned the corner, starting to get that buy-in?

MIKE HASTINGS: That's a great question. I talked about this earlier today.

I'll give one guy a lot of credit who is no longer with our program but still a friend of the program. I get to see him a couple times a year. He has his own family now. Eriah Hayes.

My first year -- I've gone back and apologized to him multiple times for being probably as demanding or as hard as I was on him on exactly what we're talking about. I had a question the other day about the last time we played Denver, what that history has been. It was a while ago. It didn't go very well.

Hayeser was on that team. It was soon after that that I asked him, Are you a part of this team or is this your team as a leader?

He stepped up, said, It's my team. He led by example, by holding people accountable.

I'm very thankful and blessed that I had someone like him that was strong enough for a young coach who probably pushed a little too hard to not wilt. He stood in there and took what I was giving him. Has become an unbelievable father, mentor for some of our young guys because he signed a free agent deal after that to go play in San Jose. Has just done a great job of flying the flag for our program.

I would probably give him the credit because I was able to go back and explain that to the next group that was coming in, what he gave up for the betterment of the club.

Q. Obviously having previous Frozen Four experience is crucial, even if the atmosphere last year wasn't the same as it is now. What have you seen from the guys in terms of their approach that has been different? How beneficial do you think that's been for them?

MIKE HASTINGS: The time that I saw it become a little bit different was when we won the regional in Loveland, there was a little bit of a euphoria after that game like, Wow, we did it.

This year, when we won the regional, I just sensed a little bit different attitude from our guys. Had multiple individuals in that celebration come up and say, Hey, you know what, we're not done yet. We want to get to where we're trying to get to this Saturday.

That was a big difference. I think that's that experience where I think they were excited about getting here a year ago. I think there's a little bit more focus on getting to the top instead of having this be short of what we experienced a year ago.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, thanks very much. Best of luck.

MIKE HASTINGS: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports