

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Michigan vs Quinnipiac

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Brandon Naurato

Gavin Brindley

Dylan Duke

Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



COACH NAURATO: Beautiful weather with the team and all the guys just enjoying the ride and getting ready for tomorrow.

MODERATOR: Back to your home state, how's it been and any good tidbits about what's happened so far?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: It's pretty exciting. It doesn't happen too often where you get to play a Frozen Four in your hometown, especially Florida. Definitely excited to be back and can't wait to play tomorrow.

DYLAN DUKE: It's been a lot of fun. The journey here has been a blast. And we're here on a business trip. That's what we've been talking about all week. And we're enjoying it, but we're also preparing for tomorrow.

Q. You mentioned it being a business trip this year. I wonder how does that differ maybe from sort of the feel last year, and what sort of did you learn going through the this a first-time?

DYLAN DUKE: Last year we definitely learned that it happens fast. You get here, there's a lot of distractions and then you play one game to win or go home. We know that. We have a lot of guys that played in that game last year and know what it takes to win a game on Thursday. And it's one game at a time. Our focus is on Thursday.

Q. What do you maybe do differently?

DYLAN DUKE: I think it's a lot of the same. Just preparing. It's the same as we prepare in Allentown, same as we prepared in Minnesota for the Big Ten Championship. We're doing what we did all year.

Q. Brandon, you put the focus on the players this year, not about you. With that said, the contract, just getting that out of the way, how much is that kind of relief off your mind and give you sense of comfort now?

COACH NAURATO: I think it's good. I think I told Warde after he announced it, excited about it and honored. I just keep thinking about Tampa Bay and what we have to do here. I know how it sounds, but extremely honored. I'm excited about it. It's a dream come true. But really just focused on this weekend.

Q. Brandon, speak a little bit to Dylan and the growth that he's kind of shown. And then for Dylan, just to kind of be here at Amalie Arena where you spent time during the development camp last year and the team that drafted you?

COACH NAURATO: Dylan's been unbelievable. I think he might go down in history, he's only a sophomore, as one of the best net front power play and net front guys ever to play at Michigan.

But he's always been a leader, even growing up at U.S.A. I think he just feels more comfortable showing that leadership on the ice as a sophomore. We need more guys like Dylan Duke at Michigan in the future.

DYLAN DUKE: It's definitely pretty special to be here. Got to spend a little time here in the summer. And it's just an honor to be drafted here. And Tampa Bay has done a great job making everyone feel welcome. They've done that in the summer. And it's an honor to be here.

Q. Gavin, as a freshman what were the feelings or emotions when you first stepped into the arena?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: You can't really explain it, especially being at home with the group of guys that we've gone through everything with all year. We've had so many bumps in the road and just overcome everything that has really come our way.

Coming here and breathing in this Florida air has been



really nice. And a beautiful rink. I've seen a ton of games here growing up. It's awesome to be back and we're jacked up.

Q. Gavin and Dylan, how has it felt like playing for Brandon this past season after his first year at the helm of Michigan?

DYLAN DUKE: It's been really special. He's done a great job. He makes all of us better hockey players, but at the same time, more importantly, better people.

He's got a great open-door policy. We all have no hesitation anytime we need anything walking into the locker room and asking him to watch video.

Or even if it's not about hockey, just we know we can go to him, talk to him, and he's done an unbelievable job. So we're all super thankful that we have him and we have him for more years to come.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Dylan said it pretty well. He cares more about us as individuals and as people than what we do on the ice. And I think I talk to him more about my life and what's going on away from the rink than hockey.

He's a hockey nerd. He loves the game. He wants us to get better. He's awesome to have around. And I'm glad he's going to be around for a while.

Q. Can you just shine a light on Adam and what makes him so special, how he's able to do what he does, maybe some behind-the-scenes things that we don't see that contribute to his on-ice performance, and why he deserves to win the Hobey?

DYLAN DUKE: Adam is something that you definitely don't get to see too often. He's probably the best player I've ever played with. Owen and Matty Beniers are right there with him.

But he does a lot to make himself better. And at the end of the day he's a great person. I think that's why he has so much success on the ice. He treats us all with respect. And he's like the rest of us. He doesn't act like he's supposed to go first overall, second overall, whatever he's going to go here. He's just a special person.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: He's a generational talent. I've played against him since I was 10 years old. We've had lots of battles growing up. And playing on the same team now, it's pretty special, and now playing on the same line.

He's one of the best players in the team. He's in my dorm watching hockey every night after practice. He's grown so

much as a person, too, I think since the beginning of the year, just maturing.

And his game, it's obviously something special to watch. He's a pro and with that frame of his and what he can do out there, it's pretty special. So just really happy to have him around.

THE MODERATOR: What is it like to coach him?

COACH NAURATO: Just his overall competitiveness. I think we've got a lot of that with this group. And just his motor. Like, things that I've talked a lot about Adam this year and all these guys but things you wouldn't notice is like Topher Scott brought his daughter out to skate the other day. She's 6 years old. And a couple of the guys, Adam being one of them, goes and hangs out with his daughter for 15 minutes on the ice.

I've got an 8- and a 6-year-old, and they've been buzzing around. These guys have all been unbelievable to them.

It's the culture that these guys have created. I think it's a credit to them. And Adam's a part of that. All these guys. He doesn't want to be treated like a high-end draft pick or think he's above it. They're just teammates and buddies and enjoying the ride.

Q. Going back to Naurato for a little bit, for Gavin and Dylan, what was your reaction to when you found out that the interim tag was removed? And were you surprised at all when it came when it did?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Not surprised at all. He should be here for a long time. We knew it was coming. We were so ecstatic. Even when I was going through the recruitment process and he was an assistant coach, he was one of the big reasons I wanted to play at Michigan.

And he was the head coach this year, so it worked out really well. We couldn't be happier that he was sticking around for a couple more years.

DYLAN DUKE: Yeah, I definitely was not surprised one bit. I knew that was coming. But I was just happy for him. I think we all were kind of waiting for it to happen. But we all knew it was going to happen. It was just a matter of time.

When it happened, we were all ecstatic. We just felt good for him and knew it was coming.

Q. We had Ryan Johnson up here a couple of minutes ago. He's from California. You're a Floridian. Is there a different identity for guys who grow up in warm

areas and only see ice in an unnatural state?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: It's a little different for sure. I know me growing up I played pretty much every sport. And hockey was always my number one. But I did pretty much everything. And walk in the rink in flip-flops and shorts every single day, it was so much fun to come to the rink.

I wanted to be there all the time. I didn't have to deal with the snow or bad weather or snow days or anything like that.

So, like I said, just playing every other sport growing up and being in the water all the time. And there's never a dull moment growing up where you didn't have any fun. So it made coming to the rink a lot more fun, for sure.

COACH NAURATO: Don't you feel it, Jess? Everyone's mood is better since we got here. It's the vitamin D.

Q. Heard it from Knies, how much warm-weather clothing does your mother send you?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: None. I keep the same five pairs of shorts and five shirts and they're with me this weekend. We don't get good weather too often. But when it's nice weather in Ann Arbor, it's really nice. So best of both worlds I guess.

Q. You played in a very difficult Big Ten this year. It was a grind week in and week out. What does having played in that conference do when it's a single-game elimination like tomorrow?

COACH NAURATO: You hope it gives you an advantage because we've been through it. We played a lot of tough games all year long. And tough games without -- I think these two guys, don't quote me, are the only ones on the roster that have played every single game. So every game has been tough.

We've won some. We've lost some. We've given up leads. We've taken leads back. I think it's good to kind of go through everything and succeed and fail through it. And you just hope that it preps you for one game and anything can happen.

Q. Dylan, how much are you in contact with the Lightning, just as you've developed? And what are the ways your game has grown the most since you've been at Michigan?

DYLAN DUKE: I've talked to them every couple of weeks. Their player development guy, JP Côté, I have phone calls with him, and just kind of go over my game and what's

going on.

And then I talk with the skating coaches pretty regularly, just to kind of work on that aspect of my game. And they gave me little things that I could do on my own when we have extra ice and extra time.

Q. Gavin, how are you supposed to dress for an outfit that's warm weather but converts into cold weather for the rink?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: It's a little different. But I've been doing it my whole life. It's kind of routine. My dad's side of the family is from Thunder Bay, Ontario. It's not very warm up there. Just got lucky, I guess.

Q. What I mean is, we need help because it's really hot and then really cold in here?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Bring a zip-up hoodie, I guess, take it off. I know yesterday I was wearing a zip-up and I had no shirt on underneath. So I was just zip it all the way down as soon as I was walking outside.

Q. What are your thoughts about your opponent tomorrow, about Quinnipiac? What do you know about them? What are you looking at in terms of this matchup?

COACH NAURATO: I would say first off we respect Quinnipiac. They're a well-coached team. Very predictable in what they do. Very structured. I think they have like the most wins in the last two years in Division I. We played them last year. So there's some familiarity there.

They're a really good team. And whether it's them or BU or us or Minnesota, I think any team that has success this weekend, they have to earn it. And it's not as much about we're prepared for them. We don't do our pre-scouts the day before.

These guys that know what Quinnipiac was going to do a week and a half ago, and then we're just working on what our identity is and how we can have success throughout the whole week. And that's what we're worried about.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Naurato said it really well. They're really well-structured, well-coached. We've been preparing for them all week. They're here for a reason. But at the same time we have to play our game. I feel if we do what we do best we'll have a good chance to play on Saturday. It's going to be a battle. They're a really good team, but we're a really good team, too.

DYLAN DUKE: I think a couple of the guys played for Rand at the World Juniors and know a little bit about him and what he's all about. But I think at the end of the day it's about what we do and how Michigan plays. So we're just going to prepare like it's any other team and be ready to go.

Q. You talked about the grind of playing in the Big Ten week in and week out. What are the pros and cons of getting the extended time off after the Big Ten Tournament?

COACH NAURATO: Somebody asked this right after the tournament, after the Big Ten Tournament, I could go either way. We could play -- I think since we got the week off you can take advantage of resting everyone's bodies and the recovery part of it and the prep.

I don't see it as an advantage or disadvantage. It's what the schedule says. And when it's time to show up, we'll be there.

DYLAN DUKE: I think Coach hit it right on the head. If we had to play, we'd be ready to go. If we have the time, we'll use the time to prepare and be ready whenever the game is.

Q. Brandon, Quinnipiac is currently a new blood in college hockey. They made the Frozen Four three times the past 11 years from being a D-III program when Rand first started. Can you talk about Rand has done to improve the program in his 29 years there?

COACH NAURATO: I'm not familiar with his history. I know they're a really good team. I'm just thinking about this year.

Did BU make the tournament last year? Doesn't matter, right? They won Hockey East. They're a top-five team in the country. Minnesota? I understand; I'm giving an analogy.

I'm not familiar with Rand's background. I know they're a really, really good team and we respect them. And we'll have to earn it on Thursday, and we're prepared for that.

Q. Going back a few years, were there maybe some similarities and differences from the Frozen Four team you played on compared to this group this year?

COACH NAURATO: That's a good question. I think we lost my sophomore year. We were a really, really good team. We lost to a good North Dakota team. They had Toews and Oshie and those guys. And I think we had 11 freshmen that year -- Pacioretty and Caporusso and

Palushaj and Carl Hagelin, guys like that.

Very similar to this year. The difference would be we didn't have the experience of being in it the year prior. So I think with the sophomores through seniors, I think that's a bigger deal to have been through it and have that experience and just know how to mentally prep and what to be prepared for. Similar dynamic with the young guys.

Q. Who is running the playlists?

DYLAN DUKE: I think you have Samo running it.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Samo. I got kicked off.

COACH NAURATO: It's much better than last year. (Indiscernible) had it last year. I like rap but too much '90s rap. Much more genre this year.

Q. Gavin, why did you get kicked off?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Couldn't tell you. Politics in there. (Laughter).

Q. When you have a strength-on-strength matchup like this, your offense versus their defense, how do you break that down deciding what you want to do when you know they're just as good on the other side?

COACH NAURATO: Sam, you want to answer this? The same way we do with every team. Here's what they do. Here's what they're good at. Here's where we can expose them. And then we're never going to change what we do; we're going to do it our way. There's just different options inside of situations or structure that our guys know.

So we've been preparing to play different styles of game all year. And depending on whether we're playing Penn State, Minnesota, Michigan State or BU or whoever, we know what we need to do. And then there's little areas of the game that we put a little more focus on to expose the other team.

Q. I'm curious with all of the injuries that you all had to deal with on the blue line during the second half, about the value of the consistency of some of those older players like Keaton Pehrson, Jay Keranen, Steven Holtz, the job they've done, especially the second half?

COACH NAURATO: All those guys have done an unbelievable job. I think it's great for different guys throughout the year to have the opportunity to get in the lineup, to be on the power play, to be on the penalty kill because you never know what's going to happen later in the year and when guys need to step up.

I think there's been games where Keaton Pehrson was a healthy scratch this year as an assistant captain. And he's also played with Luke Hughes and played games where he's played 24 minutes. So I think that's big time.

I think that's a credit to Keaton and Jay and all these guys and how hard they've worked to prove that they can add value to this team, and the value that they add on and off the ice, more importantly, has been unbelievable this year with the younger guys and just bringing them along and gaining trust and respect.

Q. A few moments ago, in the locker room, Seamus talked about when he was five, six years old, his father purchased a Lightning jersey for him, he became a Stamkos fan. Did you have any allegiance to the Lightning or any other team or favorite players when you were that age?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: I always rooted for the Lightning and Panthers growing up. My favorite player growing up was Sidney Crosby. He was the first jersey I had. So I'm a big Penguins fan. But I always pull for the Florida teams and hopefully they go deep so we can go see some games towards the end of the year.

Q. Gavin, I did a story a couple of years ago. Actually with your dad, the Florida Alliance and kind of the unique way that you guys were developing players. Clearly so many Division I, couple NHL picks came through there. What can you say about that development model and how it got you ready for college hockey?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: It is really unique. I don't think anyone in the country did it or does it now. It's pretty tough with all the guys from all over the state. We had a couple kids from outside the state as well coming to play. So we didn't practice together during the week. We'd only practice together on the weekends, and you train in your own rink during the week, locally, and kind of work on your own skills.

And on the weekend, you come together, either practice three or four times that weekend or fly to Detroit or Chicago, Toronto, wherever it was, to play the tournament.

I'm so grateful he did that for me and all the guys that played there. And we've had some high-end guys come out of there and a lot of guys still playing hockey now.

Q. I would like to know the story behind the mullets and kind of where that came from, who started it, who's the barber and what's the upkeep. Fill me in on

the moments.

DYLAN DUKE: When I was a freshman last year, we were going into the Big Ten playoffs, and the older guys we were like, all right, we're going to get mullets. We were just freshmen. We're like, okay, let's go. We'll do whatever. We all went to a barber shop together, made a whole day out of it. We were there two hours, just hanging out.

Everyone got mullets, laughing at each other's different types of mullets we all got. And we did the same thing this year. It's a fun little day. We try and, Captain Nolan Moyle would tell us, try to look as ridiculous as possible for the playoffs. We got some good mullets and just a fun day.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: I just think it's a fun day for us to be together. We go every Sunday. And I know that a couple of us got them touched up before we came here. But this place in Ann Arbor, Barber Studio, done an unreal job. I know Naur has been getting his cut there for a while. He has a little mullet but doesn't show it.

COACH NAURATO: It's a little undercover.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: I like it. I think it's a fun thing to do for the playoffs. I know guys, like, dye their hair and stuff like that. I think the mullet is kind of -- you could always kind of fix it up after the year and go back to your normal look. I might keep it for a while. We'll see.

MODERATOR: Who has the best? Who is leading the charge?

GAVIN BRINDLEY: I think Adam has got a pretty good one. He has long flow. And Johnny has a good one.

DYLAN DUKE: Draper.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Draper, he's got a good one and a good beard going too.

COACH NAURATO: I would say Adam's struggling. I think he's Samo and Duker.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: He has bald spots.

COACH NAURATO: I'm not talking about that. I meant the lines. He got the lines cleaned up. Looks better. You did, too, a couple weeks ago.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: Mine's pretty high on me.

COACH NAURATO: Looks good now.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: I can't say my own look is good. I

know my own look's good. (Laughter)

Q. I'm going to date myself here, but Michigan hockey used to cut each other's hair. That tradition is done? It was long before.

COACH NAURATO: Don't give them any ideas.

Q. Maybe like eight years ago. So it was long before your time.

DYLAN DUKE: Guys were telling me that last year couple years ago someone let someone cut their hair, did a bowl cut, it didn't turn out very well. I don't know. I think they shut that down.

GAVIN BRINDLEY: I don't know if you would be able to trust anyone on this team to cut hair.

Q. How do you think Gavin and Adam and Rutger's skill sets complement each other?

COACH NAURATO: I think it's been great. Just like the motor of Adam and Gavin, they're all ultra competitive. All can make plays. All can score.

I think their game really changed. And Gav's going to laugh at me, but they are making their plays. They're doing a lot of really good things, but when they started going to the net more -- it wasn't that they were perimeter, but just finishing at the net as a unit. And all three of them, not just one guy once in a while, they started putting up big numbers and scoring a lot of big goals. So they've been outstanding together.

I think it's great that we have four lines going right now. And we can mix and match even going to the second period tomorrow. And I think we'd be in a really good spot. All these guys are just really predictable with each other. You could see the chemistry off the ice and how close they are. I think it filters to on the ice, which is awesome.

Q. Do you remember the exact date you put that line together?

COACH NAURATO: I don't. I remember asking Duker if he was cool with it before I made the switch. No, but all good. All these guys have been rolling.

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