

# NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Wisconsin vs North Dakota

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

T-Mobile Arena

## North Dakota Fighting Hawks

**Dane Jackson**

**Abram Wiebe**

**Bennett Zmolek**

Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



Let the Dogs Out.

ABRAM WIEBE: That's not my thing (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: How has the experience been?

ABRAM WIEBE: Obviously it's been unbelievable. Obviously coming to Vegas, some nice weather. It was snowing earlier in the week in Grand Forks. It's nice to get out and enjoy the weather, kind of explore Vegas and everything.

It's been unbelievable just our setup and everything like that. Just looking back at our year, building our body of work since July and August. Coming together as a group of guys, just kind of grinding all season. Everybody is really excited to show it this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Dane, much has been said about the overall goaltending in this Frozen Four. Can you talk to that a little bit, what the challenges will be trying to beat these guys, and your goaltender who has had a remarkable freshman year, what has made him so good at such a young age?**

DANE JACKSON: Yeah, I think it starts with Jan's demeanor. He has kind of a laid-back kind of quiet confidence that doesn't get too riled up about too many things.

I think his approach kind of allows him to just have that kind of not be flustered by anything. I really think that he'll handle the spotlight well here. All season he's played extremely solid for us. He just gives us a real confidence to our group.

He's kind of earned everything he's got. He didn't get any starts with our first five games. When he went in, he was outstanding right from the start. He gives our team a lot of kind of belief and confidence to play our game.

We take a lot of pride in how hard of defense we play. I think our D core is outstanding. He sure helps us out with

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by North Dakota. We'll start with Dane, just some opening thoughts on what the experience has been like so far.

DANE JACKSON: It's been outstanding. The welcome we had right away at the hotel, how everything has been set up at the arena has been incredible.

We're obviously extremely excited to be back here. These guys have put in a lot of work all the way from summer training through July and August, a great training camp, then a consistent full season. The amount of buy-in, team-first kind of attitude from our players has been a real strength to our group.

We are fired up to compete here, put our best foot forward.

THE MODERATOR: Bennett, how has it been? Have any fun in the media car wash or any stories?

BENNETT ZMOLEK: Not that I've heard of, no.

THE MODERATOR: Have you been to Vegas before?

BENNETT ZMOLEK: I have not. First time.

THE MODERATOR: Been out and about?

BENNETT ZMOLEK: A little bit, but not too much.

THE MODERATOR: What do you have to say to the assembled media, words of wisdom?

BENNETT ZMOLEK: I don't have any words of wisdom.

THE MODERATOR: Abram, I witnessed you singing Who

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the way he approaches and is so consistent.

The second thing I always talk about with him is elite puck handling. He really helps our team have clean breakouts. He gets the stick on a lot of pucks, gets these guys pucks with their toes up ice, so they can make good middle breakouts and kind of start our transition. That's been a big thing limiting our time playing on the defensive zone.

It seems like a lot of these young guys are playing at a high level. With Jan, he played a lot of junior hockey, a year in Portland, a year in Dubuque. Even though he's a younger player, freshman in college, he's had a lot of big-game experience. I imagine that seems to go with a lot of other guys, too. Even though they're first-year players, they're established in the league. Prepared for the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Has there ever been four freshmen starting goaltenders in the Frozen Four? First time, yeah. Pretty cool.

**Q. In the same vein, talking about the goaltenders, teams with quality goaltenders tend to rely on their goalies to cover up mistakes. With the teams in this Frozen Four, with three of them being in the top five scoring teams in the country, how do you remind yourselves to this is great to rely on the goalie, but we still have to take care of our own end in front of them?**

BENNETT ZMOLEK: Yeah, I would say we just have to stick to our details, try not to give up too much. Yeah, with Spoonie, he kind of makes us comfortable in uncomfortable situations. He's been our backbone all year. Can't say good enough things about him.

But yeah, just trying not to make the mistake, just try to a simple, clean game, play hard in front of him.

ABRAM WIEBE: Yeah, I just think having Spooner behind us brings a lot of confidence, especially in our D core. Speaking what Jack said, he's one of the best puck handlers in college hockey. Huge for us, especially breaking out pucks and things like that. He does a remark annual job in that.

Being in the Frozen Four, every team is going to be good, especially Wisconsin, good offensive firepower. I think it's power for us to play simple and play our game because one mistake could cost us the season. I think it's important to rely on our guys and know we're going to get the job done.

**Q. Bennett or Abram, coming into the season there was so much you guys had to prove. Now at this point teams are chasing you guys. How are you embracing**

**the turnaround?**

ABRAM WIEBE: Yeah, I think it's obviously shows to what we are as a team. I think we've done just a tremendous job throughout the season just building and growing as a team.

I think coming into the season, we were ranked I think 13th or something in the nation. We weren't satisfied with that. We kind of just, you know, grew together every single day and got better day by day. I think we've proven to be one of the best teams in college hockey. We're excited for the challenge this weekend.

BENNETT ZMOLEK: I think we just kind of focus on ourselves. We're not really comparing ourselves to any other team. Trying not to look outward, kind of look inward, try to keep getting better each and every day. Yeah, just kind of make it to here and try to keep playing our style of game.

**Q. Coach, as a player, you played for some very successful coaches, John Tortorella, Bruce Boudreau. How does that form your coaching style?**

DANE JACKSON: I was really fortunate to be influenced by a lot of great coaches, including our college coach Gino Gasparini. Every coach has a little bit of a different emphasis. That's actually something my mom told me, you can always learn something from every coach.

Definitely something that kind of put in my mind when I was named head coach, was I think you got to have your own identity, be true to who you are, but you definitely take a lot of experience from small things you learn. John Tortorella, he was super hard on us, but you knew he cared about us. He was there for you. He wasn't just yelling at us, he wanted to get the team better, and prepare you to be an NHL player.

Ted Nolan was outstanding just being relatable to the guys and really made it fun to come to the rink.

Similar to Bruce. Bruce was a sharp guy, but cared about us a lot, made it fun, was always kind of teaching from the positive aspect. We'd always have really good success because he never got, I don't know, tired of coming to the rink or whatever.

I think everybody is a little bit different. Definitely try to take a little bit of things I appreciated from all those guys, then put your own kind of flavor on it. You got to be true to who you are. I've been extremely fortunate.

Again, whenever we talk about our staff, I just talk about so



important to mention Dillon Simpson and Matt Smabu and Bryn Chzyk. Those guys are elite at their job, a huge influence on how we communicate and connect with our players.

**Q. Dane, we talked recently about team building. The fact that I believe, I'm not a math guy, you brought 11 guys after last year's Frozen Four team. Can we officially say the era of getting commitments two or three years in advance is dead and it's not necessary anymore? Look what you've done to be here right now.**

DANE JACKSON: Yeah, good point. We actually talk about that in our coaches room quite a bit. Bryn Chzyk has our future years kind of lined up with our magnets of future guys. There's a couple holes in there. He's stressed out about that.

We often look back and say, There are so many good players in the CHL. There's good players in the USHL down here, too. It's nice trying to pick players that are just a year away from coming or months away from coming versus guys that are two and three years away.

No doubt that the plethora of really good players out there allows you to be a little bit more patient. We feel super fortunate about the way our university supports us and the facilities we have to be able to try to kind of find the right kids for our program.

THE MODERATOR: A lot of things here at the Frozen Four in Vegas. We had a first year, did anybody see the showgirls and Elvis?

DANE JACKSON: Yeah, I think a couple of our guys were distracted during the shootout (laughter).

**Q. Coach, after going through practice today, how do you feel about the status of Josephson?**

DANE JACKSON: Yeah, he's going to be good to play. He's healthy. He's ready to go. So he'll be in. It's a huge benefit for us. Ollie brings a ton of two-way game, he's one of our best penalty killers. A real reliable centerman. Plays with a lot of pace and tenacity.

For a young guy, he's got a ton of presence too. You could see why he was a former captain. I'm sure he'll be a captain one day here as well. I feel extremely fortunate to have the benefits he brings on the ice and in our locker room.

**Q. Abram, it's got to be special that you're playing here in Vegas, more familiar with the city than the**

**other guys. People been asking you for advice?**

ABRAM WIEBE: Yeah, obviously been down here a couple times. It's always pretty cool to be back in the nice weather.

Yeah, guys have been obviously asking some things to do and places to be. Been pretty cool to be back and also be here with the guys.

THE MODERATOR: What have those recommendations have been?

ABRAM WIEBE: I think just go downtown and just kind of walk around and see all the amazing buildings and stuff like that. It's pretty cool to see how many people come down here and travel just to be here.

Also just seeing all the fans, they're everywhere. It's been quite a cool experience so far.

**Q. Dane, have you told the guys about 1982, what it means to the green and white to play the red?**

DANE JACKSON: Yeah, we did. We showed them a little video of Cary Eades chatting with the guys from Wisconsin and their bench. We showed our regional in 2008 when we were down two going into the third period in that regional. I remember Oshie making a big play for us. Our captain Rylan Kaip scored. Oshie made a great play to pass to Duncan. Tied it up and won in overtime. We showed a couple of those moments. Talked about the traditional rivals we had in the old WCHA and the battles we had.

A lot of respect for their program. They always were tough, physical, really well-coached teams. Wanted our guys to know about the history.

I think they're one of the few teams in college hockey that we have a losing record against. We'll work to try to get one more win on the board for our club on Thursday.

THE MODERATOR: Terrific. Best of luck tomorrow. Thanks for being here. Appreciate it.

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