

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Denver vs Michigan

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

T-Mobile Arena

Michigan Wolverines

Brandon Naurato

Josh Eernisse

Adam Valentini

Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Michigan. Congratulations, Josh, for receiving the Elite Scholar Athlete Award. 3.974 GPA.

JOSH EERNISSE: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: That goes to the student-athlete with the highest GPA in the Frozen Four.

Brandon, some thoughts on arriving in Vegas, back in the Frozen Four, how the day has been.

BRANDON NAURATO: Just excited to be here. Got here Monday night. What an awesome experience so far. Just looking forward to the tournament.

Everyone keeps talking about the four bluebloods, all the national championships. All three games are going to be sold out. It will be great for college hockey.

THE MODERATOR: Josh, you been to Vegas before?

JOSH EERNISSE: I have.

THE MODERATOR: How is it to be back? Different circumstances.

JOSH EERNISSE: Yeah, definitely. I like these conditions a lot better (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Adam, have you been here before?

ADAM VALENTINI: Yeah, I've been here a couple times on vacation.

THE MODERATOR: Any tips for us that haven't been here

before, guys?

BRANDON NAURATO: Drink a lot of water, get your sleep (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions from the floor.

Q. Coach, you've obviously been here four times now both as a coach and player. What have you learned from each experience that has given you preparation?

BRANDON NAURATO: I think the biggest thing is manage our emotions. Different experiences at different times. With this group just positive vibes and sticking to our identity, just having fun.

Q. We saw your men's basketball team break a long drought for the Big Ten earlier this week. Great season for the Big Ten. How much the drought of Big Ten men's hockey championships is in anyone's mind?

BRANDON NAURATO: That's for the media. We don't think about that stuff at all. We're pumped for Dusty. I know a lot of our guys are tight with the basketball team. We all watched the game the other night. Super excited for them. Excited to have the opportunity to do the same thing.

THE MODERATOR: Adam, what have you got, basketball? Were you watching?

ADAM VALENTINI: Yeah, we were all watching at dinner. We were all pretty fired up. We're pretty close with a couple, so it was great.

THE MODERATOR: Josh?

JOSH EERNISSE: Just a cool experience to see how the campus reacts in the sport we have as a university as a whole and through athletics, to see kind of everybody come together, rally around that. Now the focus has kind of turned to us. We hope to utilize that momentum and the support we have. We have an opportunity to do something very special here. So we're looking forward to tomorrow



night.

Q. What's the biggest impact Max Pacioretty has made on the program? What is it like to have him around the program this year?

ADAM VALENTINI: Yeah, I mean, he's the best. He's had every angle on pro side of hockey. Personally I've picked up a lot from him. Having him on our staff has been really the best. He's kind of a guy that I look up to, also just a great human.

JOSH EERNISSE: Yeah, it's been really special to have somebody like that around our facility, around our locker room. He's a guy that played a long time in the NHL. Between his own experiences and what he's seen from other guys and the he played with, there's a lot of knowledge.

Whether it's helping out the staff, and seeing different systematic things in the NHL that translated to our own team or teams that are playing. Just little things within skills and little guys' games that he can give tips and pointers. He's been a valuable asset. It's been really cool have to him around the rink and to learn from someone like him.

BRANDON NAURATO: With Max, just the mentorship. Obviously, he's got a ton of experience and knowledge in the NHL, being the captain of an Original Six team. At lunch he's sitting with the guys, not the coaches. Spending time more with them as people than hockey players, which has been really cool.

Q. Adam, coming in as one of the younger guys, what has the leadership, the biggest piece of leadership that you've taken away from Josh and the rest of the seniors?

ADAM VALENTINI: Yeah, I think just day by day pushing the best foot forward, trying to get that 1% better every day. Just coming to the rink having a purpose, just really working as hard as possible every day to get better as days go on.

Q. Brandon, 14 newcomers I believe to the team this year after missing the tournament last year. Can you give us some insight about the team building, the fact that you seem to have balanced very well to reach into all the different pools of talent to build this team?

BRANDON NAURATO: That's a good question. 15 new players. Huge credit to the assistant coaches and the roster management and building it the right way. It's the deepest our team's ever been.

The reason being for that is guys accepting roles. Usually when you say that, that means I'm a point guy, now I have to play more of a third, fourth line role. Every night we go by, we don't know which line is going to be our first line, second line. We have been rolling four lines all year. Different guys have taken different on the penalty kill versus the power-play. Obviously what Eerissee and Draper have done on the PK. But Molinaro and Schifsky have been on the power-play for two years. They accepted that role. Now you have 11 shorthanded goals. Everyone trying to find value as an individual. Everybody is rooting for each other.

THE MODERATOR: Brandon, you're talking about a book on Monday.

BRANDON NAURATO: There's only 12 guys around for spring term, just optional book club. We read three chapters per week of James Kerr's Legacy. The best part about it, it's not a book club where you're reviewing what was talked about, but Chrissie Powers and Evan Hall ran it, oversaw it. Some of the other coaches sat in, just like the players, as peers.

The coolest thing was just the vulnerability of some pain we went through as a group last year, how we can overcome that in the future, help support each other. It really had nothing to do with hockey. I just felt like it brought us tighter and everyone is pulling on the same rope.

Q. Josh, you are compared to many other players, four years, Scholastic Athlete of the Year, that's not everybody's college path. Talk about that lifetime experience being four years in college than and being scholastic athlete of the year, at least from the Frozen Four?

JOSH EERNISSE: Yeah, it's been something that's been really special. I just think between, like, the friendships and the guys I've gotten to play with, the memories I have around the rink, obviously the academic and extracurricular component to all that, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be able to be fortunate enough to have four years to experience it with something that's really special. It's kind of surreal the time is coming to an end.

I just tried to make the most of every opportunity I was able and fortunate to get. Whether that was career ventures through our academic career center, going to networking events, I just tried to maximize all the resources that were given. That extends to the rink through our coaching staff, just how dedicated they are to us in terms of film and development as a person and as a player.

I think that's kind of one thing that's unique about our team, too. That's really brought us together. They have a plan for each guy individually, also as a team. They kind of mesh together and really gel.

My time here at Michigan has been something that's been really special and some of the best years I've had. It's been really exciting. It's kudos to everybody around us from the coaches, to the players, our support staff, the teachers, the university as a whole. What an opportunity. It's been unbelievable.

BRANDON NAURATO: This is the definition of college hockey. Undrafted free agent. He's going to sign an NHL contract as soon as our season is over, hopefully it's Saturday. What he's done for him as a 17-year-old and for Adam Valentini to see Josh Eernisse and all these other seniors and their habits every day in the gym, in the classroom, just doing it the right way.

If he plays his last game Saturday or he plays 20 years in the NHL, Josh Eernisse is going to be a high-performing person in society, a business owner, a father, a husband.

We all see Michigan, a packed house in Indianapolis, all the support, when the football team won the national championship. That same support is there academically and for our kids as people. The career ventures have been unbelievable for them. It's college hockey. I'm talking about Michigan right now. But it's college hockey in general. It's way bigger than what you're getting on the ice.

Q. Josh, what do you say to a teammate that maybe his path is not going to be as long because of ability or status?

JOSH EERNISSE: I would say take advantage of every opportunity and resource. I think that's something you've seen in my time. It's grown more and more each year. Some of the younger guys are excited about it, they're asking things, questions and things about what are the career ventures, what does that look like.

They're preparing for life after college because even a successful career gets you to you're about 40 and you have to think about that and be well-prepared. That's the resources that we're given.

I think that's something that's unique about Michigan, they're worried about you as a person, getting you prepared for what is life after hockey because, like coach said, it might be one more game, it could be 20 more years. You don't know what that path is going to look like.

Making sure you're a well-rounded individual as a person, know what you kind of want to do, what life might look like after that.

Q. 11 shorthanded goals. Is that something that you practice, work on? How does that come about with such success on the PK?

JOSH EERNISSE: Yeah, I think it's just kind of the mindset we have on the kill. An opportunity to build more momentum to start swinging things in our favor. It's a challenge, you're down a man. It all comes back to a mentality and working and wanting those things.

The guys that are on the kill, some of the other guys on the team, it's very detail-oriented. That's just where your hockey sense comes out. I think back to Albany, Schifsky makes a read on an errant drop pass there, is able to bury it. Him and Moldy have been successful in the latter half of the year to create chances.

I think it starts by working, putting pressure on other teams, staying in pressure. Then looking to attack. Even when we're down a man, when the opportunities present themselves, try to make a rush, make the most of it.

It's a mix of mentality, effort and then just the personnel that we have on the kill.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thanks very much.

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