

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Wisconsin vs North Dakota

Thursday, April 9, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

T-Mobile Arena

Wisconsin Badgers

Mike Hastings

Daniel Hauser

Ben Dexheimer

Semifinal Postgame Media Conference



Wisconsin 2, North Dakota 1

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Wisconsin. We'll begin with some opening thoughts from Coach Hastings.

MIKE HASTINGS: First of all, I want to say I hope everybody had an opportunity to see what it was like as we did when we got off the bus. What an environment. Not just in the building, but everything that's going on outside.

I want to say thank you to the NCAA and for Vegas hosting this. Secondly, we knew North Dakota would be a very difficult out. They were. At this time you just got to find a way to survive and move on.

We bent but we didn't break. Good start. They flipped a game on us in the second period. If you've been on this journey, as I have with this group, sometimes we make things a little more difficult than they need to be. But when you play a team the quality of the University of North Dakota, they're going to stress you out a little bit.

I thought Daniel and Dex and the rest of the group did a great job at finding a way to get it done. We're happy to be playing Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Ben, how is your leg?

BEN DEXHEIMER: Yeah, doing just fine. I think it was just a stinger caught me between the skate and the shin pad. Guys got it done on the five-on-three. We were fortunate to get back on even strength.

Q. The penalty kill, talk about that aspect of the game,

what made it so effective today?

BEN DEXHEIMER: We spent a lot of time preparing against their power play, watching a lot of film. Honestly at the end of the day I think this time of the year it comes down to the want to get the puck out, the want to block shots. I think that was the difference with our kill tonight. Guys took a lot of effort on blocking shots, getting in lanes.

MIKE HASTINGS: I'll take the next step with that, because the guy at the end of the table won't talk about himself. Your best penalty killer has to be a goaltender. He definitely was tonight.

Q. From the start you kept them on their heels. Was this maybe the best game you played all season long in the right spot here in Vegas?

DANIEL HAUSER: Yeah, I mean, pretty close to it. An amazing game by I thought our whole lineup. But it doesn't really come as a surprise to me with how hard I see the guys work each and every day. We're always pushing each other. This is a super tight group.

I'm so proud of this group, but at the same time I've seen the work we put in. It's paying off, for sure.

BEN DEXHEIMER: Yeah, I think at this time of the year you should be playing your best hockey. We've kind of been slowly ramping up. Like Daniel said, it was pretty close to one of our best. We're just going to keep moving the trajectory upwards.

Q. Mike, I think you touched on it, but what did you see in the second period that made you call the timeout?

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, we got hemmed in. That was the second time that that had happened in that period. First time I decided not to call our timeout. The guys found a way to get us off, get a fresh line out.

Actually I looked at Dex, and he was gas-piped. We had a couple others that were, too. I just thought, you know what, when it's two rep, it's going back into your end.



There's many a games I put my head on the pillow after it's done and I have that timeout in my pocket.

I just thought it was really important for us to get a little bit of a reset. The guys did a great job getting us off the hook.

Q. Daniel, can you describe what you saw on the ice from ice level in those final seconds after that they scored to make it 2-1.

DANIEL HAUSER: To be honest with you, just the same group. We've been stressing all year that all through the peaks and valleys of a season, of a game, of a period even, we stay levelheaded.

I thought the guys did a great job of not getting rattled, going back to our game, finishing it out.

Q. Daniel, the breakaways you faced, get in your frame of mind of how you're staying composed in those kind of moments, facing those challenges?

DANIEL HAUSER: Yeah, like I said before, both as an individual and as a team, we try to stay levelheaded no matter what happens.

The guys are playing amazing in front of me. They were battling, doing their jobs. I was trying my best to do mine. Luckily came up with a save.

Obviously huge back-check from Tulker to break that one up. Plays like that really are the difference in a game.

Q. Ben, obviously scoring that goal is huge for the confidence. To score again 27 seconds later, I imagine that gave the bench a big boost. How did you see that play develop, what it did for the confidence?

BEN DEXHEIMER: Finner never pushed his D up to the blue line. Botts made an unbelievable play streaking through the middle. Kind of waited my forechecker out, zipped it through the middle.

Getting that second one was a big confidence boost. We just kind of focus on next-shift mentality. That's what we did. We flushed the first goal and went back to work.

Q. Ben, the conference has done well in different sports lately. No matter what happens in the next game, you'll have at least one in the final. You want to win for Wisconsin. Talk about the conference, representing that here in Vegas.

BEN DEXHEIMER: Yeah, the school comes first, we want to do it for those 26 guys in the room. I think with the way

the Big Ten has fallen this year, it just speaks volumes to the skill level, all up and down the sports.

First is the school. Again, I think it would be really cool to do it for the conference, the Big Ten.

Q. Ben, what does your goalie do for you today and throughout the season to make your job easier? Daniel, what did the defense do especially well today to make your job easier?

BEN DEXHEIMER: I think it gives us an unbelievable amount of confidence to make plays in the offensive zone. We know if we make a mistake, which is going to happen, we have a guy back there that can bail us out multiple times a game, which he showed today. That's been the difference this year. He's been an unbelievable rock back there for us. We love what he's doing.

DANIEL HAUSER: Yeah, I mean, I could say the exact same thing. The D core, even the forwards, in the defensive zone, I guess I'll focus on the D core, they're amazing in front of me night in, night out. Everyone is blocking shots, clearing lanes, taking sticks.

It really gives me confidence knowing they have my back. Like I said before, I try my best to have theirs. Like I said, all year they give me confidence. Yeah, they're amazing.

THE MODERATOR: Daniel, how did you possibly see that puck, with two minutes to go? Somebody in your kitchen, did you see the puck?

DANIEL HAUSER: Yeah, I luckily found a sight line, was lucky enough to get a glove on it. I want to say that was probably a box-out from one of our D men letting me see it.

Yeah, kind of a funny play, but came up with it.

Q. What was the atmosphere like for you, coming out to Vegas, your thoughts?

BEN DEXHEIMER: It's been unbelievable. It's a little different than I think anywhere else but in a good way.

We got on the ice for warm-ups. It was for me the best atmosphere I've been a part of. Two very loud fanbases that brought a lot of energy today. It's been an unbelievable host so far. We're really appreciative.

DANIEL HAUSER: Amazing. I want to thank our fans, like Dexie said, two great fanbases that created an amazing environment. The city of Vegas is amazing. The whole venue here has been awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, we'll let you go. We'll continue with questions for Coach Hastings.

Q. A good start. Some things maybe you weren't doing well, or North Dakota kept pushing?

MIKE HASTINGS: They're a good hockey team. One thing we've tried to master, it's okay not being perfect. We don't want our players afraid to make a mistake. You've got to go out and play.

A perfect example, you know, Oliver Tulk turns it over at the top of the blue line. There's a lot of guys that would give it the "shouldn't have done that." He just put it in 4WD and went back to our net and got a stick on it. A guy like Daniel, the rest of the bench. We elevated there. It's an opportunity against.

This group has been selfless really for the majority of the year. They're benefiting from it.

Q. Your team created a lot of turnovers tonight, intercepted a lot of pucks. Were they creating puck luck? Was there something in particular you think they were doing well?

MIKE HASTINGS: One example that comes to mind was Tassie's goal. Zelenov gets in, and instead of just trying to finish the guy, he's got a great stick, takes a great angle, gives the guy a little bit of, rubs some paint with him but puts a stick on that puck. That stays alive. He grabs it and finds Tassie coming off the bench.

That's an example for me that we were on top. I thought the guys did a really good job at least over the first 20 minutes at trying to make them make decisions before they wanted to.

I can tell you from sitting on the bench just listening to our guys' message to each other was, Let's get after them, stay after it. We're not a very good team when we back up. I thought the guys were rewarded for their efforts in the first period at playing on their toes.

Q. How key do you think the back-to-back goals were in the opening frame for setting the tone for this tournament?

MIKE HASTINGS: I think it was enormous. If you look at North Dakota's record when they score the first goal, it's pretty good.

Again, to get one and then add one elevates us, puts a little pressure on them. They were able to get to the break at just two. Then they came out with a little bit, really a

push. You knew they would. But to me getting off to a good start...

Our games, they're only supposed to be 60 minutes. Sometimes they're longer than that. Getting off to a good start I think's really important for momentum. Then how long can you hold onto it.

Q. I know you probably wanted a better result in the Big Ten tournament, but using those couple weeks before the regional, having these couple weeks before the Frozen Four, did you have the same approach in those gap weeks?

MIKE HASTINGS: Appreciate the question.

Yeah, we struggled with that two years ago when we were out east, we were playing Quinnipiac. We had that long layoff. It wasn't great.

Give credit to Tommy Inkrott our strength coach. We sat down, talked about it, game up with a game plan. Gave it to our leadership group. Laid it out and asked them to buy in and they have.

When you get a positive result like you did in Worcester, they're listening a little bit more when talking about rinsing and repeating. The guys did a really good job about going about their business.

When they had rest, they took it, managed it. When we needed to go to work, we did.

Like you said, I thought we had a lot of energy in that first period.

Q. In aggregate, very good team that you played, so what in aggregate are you most positive about what your team did today and what things will you be talking about tomorrow to maybe button up and doing better?

MIKE HASTINGS: Winning a hockey game at this time. Bending but not breaking. Finding a way to get it done because at this time of the season that's all that matters. It doesn't have to be Mona Lisa. You just have to find a way to make sure you're living for another day.

This group has talked about this moment for a long time. Sometimes you have to fail to succeed. That happened when we played Ohio State. This group has done a phenomenal job of looking in the mirror and say, okay, what do you have for us now?

It's exciting. I hope you all have an opportunity to get to

know the group. You're seeing what they do when they play together and how much they love each other. Now they have an opportunity to win their last game. That's all you can ask.

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