

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Wisconsin vs Denver

Friday, April 10, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

T-Mobile Arena

Denver Pioneers

David Carle

Cale Ashcroft

Kieran Cebrian

Kent Anderson

Finals Pregame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Denver. We'll start with questions.

Q. Coach, I guess the obvious connection having faced Mike Hastings in the '22 national championship game. I'm sure you remember it well. Talk about going up against him and the battle of wits there.

DAVID CARLE: Recap the '22 game?

Q. Took a while for you guys to get going in that game.

DAVID CARLE: Obviously, a lot of respect for Mike. Seemed like they started the Thursday game similar to how they started the championship game in '22: very aggressive, assertive, playing fast.

Yeah, obviously we have great memories of that night. Maddie Davis -- sorry, Magnus Chrona -- was excellent for us through the first two periods. Barrow got us going on a big power play goal. Rest is history.

Certainly have a lot of respect for Mike, how he prepares his teams. I mean, they went through a lull this year results-wise, similar to us. They found their way through it. Probably are much better off for it. They've gone through a lot of adversity.

Again, a lot of respect for what they've done. To me, they're playing obviously excellent hockey right now. They've knocked off three excellent hockey teams in Dartmouth, Michigan State, then North Dakota. We know our hands are going to be full tomorrow afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: Would any of you guys randomly watch that game?

KIERAN CEBRIAN: The '22 game?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

KIERAN CEBRIAN: Oh yeah.

KENT ANDERSON: I think we had a game that night (smiling).

Q. We've seen Johnny step up game after game throughout the streak. With the spotlight on last night, can you talk about the performance, his performance last night, the confidence that goes for Saturday now with him?

CALE ASHCROFT: Yeah, he was phenomenal last night. He has been since he entered the net. So, yeah, we have a lot of confidence playing in front of him. It's easy when you have someone back there who is doing what he's doing.

Yeah, we couldn't be more happy for him. He's an amazing guy. He's earned it. He puts the work in every day. Yeah, it's awesome. He's playing phenomenal.

Q. Kent, last night was a thrill, but how do you emotionally reset in the ultimate?

KENT ANDERSON: Yeah, obviously last night was great game. Going into double overtime, it almost feels like the game's never going to end.

No, it was an unbelievable feeling to get the win there. It's just nice to have a day here to recover, rest, reset for Wisconsin.

Q. It's a long night. You guys having to get up. The adrenaline has to be going. You're not getting to sleep that early. How do you get to the point where you can actually relax and get some sleep?

KIERAN CEBRIAN: Wasn't too late this time. We got some food at the rink, which was nice. I think the goal, kind of do some breathing, Matt Shaw tell us to do that. Sometimes read a book, watch some videos. Hopefully fall asleep at a good time.

CALE ASHCROFT: It was exciting. I room with Kent, so there's a lot of excitement in that room, for sure.

Ultimately we have our eyes set for tomorrow. We knew that this was just step one. Yeah, we're excited to go tomorrow. That was the goal coming into this.

THE MODERATOR: Did you recount the goal back in the room last night?

CALE ASHCROFT: A little bit. Gave each other a hug. We were just happy.

DAVID CARLE: Both their goals.

THE MODERATOR: What was the like last night, Kent?

KENT ANDERSON: It was obviously a little disaster with the food situation. We were able to get some here at the rink, which was great. Just get back to the hotel, give our parents a hug. Obviously was late by then. Just to get back to the room with Cale, then shut 'er done from there.

THE MODERATOR: Did you celebrate his goal again in the room?

KENT ANDERSON: Yeah, for sure.

Q. Johnny seems like a pretty quiet guy. Celebration last night after the win. With what is your favorite Johnny story from the season?

KENT ANDERSON: Yeah, I mean, Johnny Hicks, he's an amazing human. Favorite story with him? He's always putting in the extra work, but he was in our training room doing his little core workout. We were wondering what are you doing in the training room, not in the gym. He was hiding from our strength trainer, Matt Shaw, because he was doing too much.

He can never shut it off. He's a competitor. Just shows the kind of guy he is. Couldn't be more happy for him.

CALE ASHCROFT: Yeah, I think similar to Kent. Just he never really does shut it off. Actually on the plane coming down here, I saw him visualizing. He was getting reps in, moving side to side on the plane. He's dialed in. We love it.

KIERAN CEBRIAN: He's very focused. I think a couple times the whole team is going down to the weight room in the middle of the season. We like playing hockey, but going down to the weight room gets old sometimes.

Johnny is still upstairs. He's behind the couch doing his warm-up routine, way more focused than most of the rest of the team. He's having success because of his habits. They're really good.

Q. Coach Carle, you've talked in the past about your tremendous pride about representing NCHC with all the success they've had. How important is it to continue that tremendous run of success?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, it's a badge of honor for all of us to be part of the best conference in college hockey. Like I said, we're proud to be members. I think a big part of our success as a league is how hard we are on each other all throughout the year, but certainly in the second half when it comes down to just conference play.

We carry that torch very proudly. Look forward to doing again tomorrow night for our league.

Q. DC, comparing the importance of what you do, the X's and O's, the mental, how do you balance that with the success you've had? How important is mental versus what these guys do on the ice?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, both are really important. Every team's a little bit different. I mean, today is really, like we told the guys, they need to be really selfish with their time. Yesterday was a long day. We were at the rink a while. The game started a little bit late. Obviously it went late. We got back late.

We're going to spend our day here today, again, the mental and physical reset. We may or may not show some things on Wisconsin tonight. We'll certainly dive into them hard in the morning with the guys.

Today is really about the mental reset. These guys are all saying it. I mean, we didn't come here just to win yesterday. That's our sole focus. We got a great opportunity tomorrow to be able to try and cash in on what we've worked so hard for all year.

Q. You've been in games that can get long before a championship game. It's earlier tomorrow. How helpful is that? Less time to kill before you're getting into the routine.

KENT ANDERSON: Yeah, I mean, personally I don't mind what time the game is. Obviously wake up Saturday

morning with a smile on your face. A lot of excitement. So it's nice to have the early game in that way, get right to it.

THE MODERATOR: You play many of those afternoon games?

CALE ASHCROFT: I think our regional game against Western was around the same time. We're comfortable in a game like that, for sure.

Q. Obviously you lead the nation in national championships with 10. Michigan could have gone to 10 this weekend. Obviously not. You could extend to 11 tomorrow. How does defending the legacy of the DU hockey program affect you guys here? How to those numbers sit with you?

KIERAN CEBRIAN: I think as players we see the whole program, what's been built, all the alumni before us. I know all of us take a lot of pride in defending that.

We're happy that we won yesterday, but as we've said, we need to win tomorrow.

Q. I hope my research is right. I believe you guys played them in the series last year. What do you take from that that can carry over into tomorrow? Any advantage?

CALE ASHCROFT: Yeah, they're a hard team. They're playing their best hockey right now. They've had a lot of success in the tournament so far. So we know it's going to be a battle. They've earned their right to be here.

So yeah, ultimately it's going to be a good game. I know last year the series was really good. I think the first game was a pretty tight game, then we got the win on Saturday, as well.

Yeah, we know it's going to be a really good game against them.

Q. Kent, can you talk about Kristian Epperson a little bit. As captain you've seen him come along. Coach, as well. What has made him so successful, especially in the post-season?

KENT ANDERSON: Eppie has been great. Coming in day on campus in the summer, he's excited. He loves hockey. You can tell. He loves skating. He loves being on the ice. Just his game has grown so much from game one to now. On the defensive side of the puck, obviously his confidence has grown. You can see the plays he's making possessing the puck, protecting the puck.

It's amazing to see his confidence grow like that. He's been awesome.

DAVID CARLE: He's also Johnny Hicks' roommate. They both very into their routines, pretty dialed in. Diet-wise, that type of stuff...

He puts a lot of work into his game, craft, loves being at the rink. You saw last night, you've seen it through the NCAA tournament here, just the confidence he has with the puck on his stick. Head is always up. He's not afraid to hang on to it, skate out of things, find people.

Get a lot of players that maybe would have shoveled the puck to Kent on their back hand. He goes away from it, pulls it to his forehand, makes sure it's a cleaner pass for Kent to be able to handle and put it in the net.

That's the kind of poise he has. He has been doing it all year, but certainly in the last few games here for us.

Q. This is the eve of the national championship, an experience very few will ever have. Can you describe what the emotions are as you prepare?

CALE ASHCROFT: Yeah, it's super exciting. I mean, it's going to be an unreal atmosphere. Against Michigan it was unreal. So yeah, there's a lot of excitement. Just taking the day to get ready mentally and physically is going to be important for us.

Yeah, these are the games you want to play in. You come to Denver to play in these games. It's going to be awesome.

KIERAN CEBRIAN: Yeah, getting a few more days with our teammates, don't take it for granted. It's another game. We need to stick to our routines, our habits, keep it as normal as possible, but just know what's at stake.

KENT ANDERSON: A real exciting opportunity. Like Cale said, that's why you come to Denver, for these moments, these opportunities. It is what we train all year for. We're really looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, we'll let you go. Have a great day.

We'll continue with questions for Coach Carle.

Q. How valuable is having the experience of having been in this situation and having won in this situation?

DAVID CARLE: I'll tell you in, I don't know, 28 hours or so (smiling).

Obviously Hasty has a lot of experience as well. I don't know. Again, both teams are playing great. I just think it's going to be a wonderful hockey game tomorrow night.

Yeah, we're trying to use our experience to manage today the best we can. Our preparation, like was asked earlier from the mental side, to the X's and O's stuff, I think that's our most important job right now as coaches, getting the guys in a position to be able to have a chance to have success.

Q. Brendan McMorrow came to you with a different start to his start at Denver, then went on to the world juniors. Had success there. What can you tell us about his game right now, how far it's come?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, he's a player that looks different on the ice than everybody else because of his speed. Very similar to like a Jared Wright who is having a great opportunity in L.A. right now. Brendan oddly enough drafted by the same team.

His speed factor is real. He really enjoys disrupting and being hard to play against without the puck. That allows him to be able to create turnovers for not only himself but for his teammates. He's got enough skill and sense to then be able to make a play when the situation calls for it.

Really good all-around player, like many of the guys on our team, he's had his fair share of adversity with injuries, one at the start of the year, one that he obviously sustained at the World Juniors. We were a different team without him in our lineup. To get him back, he's been a big part of this stretch run and what we've been able to do.

Q. There's only been a few teams in the last couple decades have gone from a losing season to be in the championship game next year. You won it in '22 after the weird COVID year the year before. How much reflection a program has to do when you have a losing season, when you're not used to it, to spin that into the next year and use that as fuel or lessons?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean it starts with great people in the room that want to be part of the solution rather than complain or point fingers as to what the problem was.

After that year, it was Brink's sophomore year, he was at the World Juniors. We didn't have him for a ton of time in the shortened season we had. At the end of the year Philadelphia offered him a contract. He was debating whether or not he wanted to sign that or not.

One thing that really stood out and stayed with me, he

said, I came to this place to win and I want to leave it better than I found it. So I'm not going anywhere, I want to be part of the solution.

Again, we can say all we want as coaches, administrators, what have you, media, but you need guys in the room that want to dig in and be part of solutions, not run away from problems.

I think Bob, what he said in that moment, obviously that message was probably resonated to his teammates, I think that was a big part of our ability to turn that losing season, which was really challenging in a lot of different ways, many of it outside of our control because what was going on in the world, but to flip it and to have the year that we did.

Again, that year, we won our first four games, then we went on a four-game losing streak. We lost to BC, Providence, got swept at North Dakota to go 4-4 to start. Western was coming in. That was a real precarious moment. What are we going to do with our season? We swept Western. That really gave our group a lot of confidence. We only lost four or five games, whatever it was, the rest of the way.

For me it started in that conversation with Bob. We made some big decisions on who was coming back. Fifth-year eligibility. We brought in a big freshman class. Our championship teams have had 11 and nine freshmen on it: Mazur, Buium and Behrens, Rizzo, Devine. That was a big part of it as well. We had a great freshman class that came in, infused a lot of life into our program. They weren't there for the losing year. Wasn't anything different to them. They came in and kind of just did their thing.

Q. How was the pizza? Obviously Johnny had an amazing game. Is there anything you'd like to see maybe not have as much pressure on him tomorrow?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, we're thankful the staff here, they were able to help provide food that they had already prepared that they didn't use last night. We got a lot of food from them when we weren't able to make it back to the hotel in time.

Then our staff did an excellent job of ordering a bunch of food from Giordano's. We had two or three car runs to get it as it was coming out of the kitchen. The guys got fed. We got out of here a little later than we'd like. But they got fed, that was great.

John, Michigan is as good a team as anybody in the country. I said it last night, like, way different team than what we played four years ago, a more talented team

probably four years ago with the seven first rounders and four of the top five picks. The structure and the tenacity, the structure that they had, to me was a big improvement.

We limited that '22 team to 14 shots through 60 minutes. Obviously that didn't occur last night. What do we need to do differently? We need to possess more pucks, move our feet more. Obviously our power play needs to be better. There's a lot of things that we can look in the mirror and try to improve before we get in tomorrow night against Wisconsin.

Q. You've been around a lot of really quality goaltending at Denver. When do you kind of feel in the run, hey, this kid has it, something you've season before in the past of guys who have been able to lead you to a championship?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, I think hard to pick one specific moment. I just think how he came into that St. Cloud game under the circumstances I think said a lot about his ability to handle adversity and his character.

He had played the previous weekend on Friday for the third period against North Dakota. Again, Q went back in on Saturday, stood on his head. Now Q goes down with an injury the Saturday against St. Cloud. Again, the season in the balance. I think we were 13-11, whatever we were.

He handled that obviously really well. That's a huge sign of his maturity and what he was capable of. Then next weekend we had Duluth coming to town. He had a really bad episode of cramping in the Friday game. We were able to hang on and win that game 4-3 in regulation. He went out at 4-1. He came back the next night and shut them out and within won 1-0.

To me, those two moments, you kind of see what he's all about mentally and as a competitor. I think again you saw it last night after the big collision between him and Spence and Jameson around our net. He kind of took a moment to gather himself, dusted himself off, got back in there and really wasn't fazed by it.

It's kind of been him throughout this whole stretch. He's not fazed by much.

Q. What sort of psychological impact did you see that goalie change make on the group and in the locker room?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I can't say much. I mean, I think obviously there was some concern when he's laying there not moving. I think our guys know him well enough now? What do you got?

Q. (No microphone.)

DAVID CARLE: I thought you were talking about the hit last night.

What did the switch do psychologically? I mean, it probably factored in a lot because we didn't know John was this John, you know, at that moment. So Q had just stood on his head against North Dakota in a game we probably had no business winning on the Saturday night. I think it probably sparked a real level of urgency. We won the game 6-0. But John came in the game at 0-0. We had just blown a 2-0 lead the night before and lost 4-2 to St. Cloud on Friday. I think it sparked a real level of urgency.

We played two excellent periods against Duluth the next Friday night. Then we played a really good complete game that Saturday night when Johnny got the shutout.

Again, the fear of the unknown sometimes can be motivating. We didn't really know that John was going to do what he was doing at that time. I think everybody had to raise their level. It probably is a big part of why we were able to get it back on the rails.

Q. Talk about the players need to be a little selfish. Tonight is a Hobey ceremony with Eric Pohlkamp. Do you have to talk to them about that? The same vein, he loves to be up in the play, loves to shoot, be involved. Michigan was in his face. They don't let him do much. I'm sure Wisconsin will do the same thing. Do you have to talk to him about those kind of frustrations, dialing it back, letting other guys do things? Does he get it?

DAVID CARLE: No, I think you're trying to help support him through the challenge that is this week for him. We've certainly had other guys go through it. Yeah, it can be a little bit overwhelming for someone who's up for the Hobey, then trying to play in the championship game tomorrow.

Again, all three guys are very worthy. I would just say that in my opinion it's easier to game plan for a defenseman who is leading a team in scoring than it would be a forward who is leading a team and scoring, who has guys to kind of dance with. Obviously Max and TJ, one of them very deserving to win the award.

For Eric, as a defenseman, he's such a catalyst offensively and defensively, I tip my hat to Michigan, they did an excellent job on him last night. The bye week, time to prep for him, certainly helped them. It wasn't an easy game for Eric last night by any means.

Yeah, he needs to reset himself and try and compartmentalize what is tonight with the Hobey Baker ceremony. Also his family is out here. He has a really big job to do, the most important one being tomorrow.

He has to be cognizant and selfish with his time, try to put the things that don't matter on the back burner.

Have we had those conversations with him? Yeah, we have. We're very confident that Eric will be ready to go and have a good game for us tomorrow.

Q. Talking about Johnny's performance between the pipes. We saw something similar with Matt Davis in 2024. Do you think there's something about this time of year that brings out the best in your players, maybe the best in your goaltenders?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, you hear guys talk about it, they certainly relish the opportunity to play in these games. I think they have a real high appreciation for how hard it is to get here. There's a lot of things that you have to do right that are in your control, there's things that have to go right for you that are out of your control, as well.

A lot of what we talk about in recruiting is trying to find people and players that will relish these moments, not be fazed by them. Certainly we've had three great goaltenders. You can go back to further to Filip Larsson, Tanner Jaillet. There's a long history of them, back to Mannino who won in '04 and '05.

In addition to that would be Ryan Massa came onto our staff five or six years ago. He joined Magnus in his junior year, the year we won in '22, the amount of time and effort he puts into these guys to really I would say sharpen their minds into really a killer instinct and to control what they can and stay in the moment. The work he did with Magnus for two years, Maddie with four, now with Quentin and John, has been nothing short of remarkable.

He's as big a part of why we're doing what we're doing as anybody. It's not one player, one person; it's the collection of our whole staff, everything that makes our program great.

Q. You mentioned wanting to support the players. Is there a challenge in balancing making sure the guys have fun, enjoy the moment, enjoy the off-ice stuff that comes with making the Frozen Four, but at the same time making sure that focus remains on what's ultimate goal is?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think the day for that is really Tuesday and Wednesday to a degree. The NCAA, like the

media stuff, they enjoy some of that, being around the rink with all four teams here.

The Wednesday at the Frozen Four is a great day to kind of take in the bright lights of what this event is. We went for a nice dinner on Tuesday night. Then you get the police escort. There's a lot of things that, yeah, you want them to relish, soak it in.

We felt coming that Vegas would probably provide a top two to four experience of Frozen Fours available for players just because of how they support and host and entertain. We want them to have all of that.

At the same time, like you said, there's a balance. There's a competitive side to it. There's a lot of encouragement. They're here to win. They don't want to come here... They can fly to Vegas on any random weekend in the spring quarter if they want to come gamble and have a good time. It's an hour-and-a-half flight.

They know we're here for a reason. There's more important things that they have their mind set on now. I think they're a locked-in group.

Q. The statement you made a few weeks ago, this team has earned their confidence through this winning streak since January 23rd. Has it manifested even beyond your expectations?

DAVID CARLE: Hmm... No, I don't think so. We start every year with the intent of trying to get to this game. So, you know, every moment of adversity that we have, it's to try and build their mindset and build their habits and details to what is required to get through this event and this tournament.

Most of our games have been like what last night is from a score perspective. We have not had many games that were like the level in regional this year on the run that we've been on.

You're trying to constantly give them and use these moments to harden their minds to be able to, like I said, control what they can. You also need things out of your control to go your way, as well.

It's a really hard event to win. Five last Frozen Four semifinals have gone to overtime, which is a crazy thing in itself. We found a way to be 3-2 in them. We could be 0-5, we could be 5-0. That's hockey sometimes.

We're excited to have the opportunity to play together one more time, be with each other for one more game and one more day, prepare for what we know again is an excellent

team, well-coached team. It's going to be a great atmosphere and a great product and I think showcase of what college hockey is.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

DAVID CARLE: Thanks, everybody.

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