

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Wisconsin vs Denver

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T-Mobile Arena

Wisconsin Badgers

Mike Hastings

Gavin Morrissey

Joe Palodichuk

Finals Pregame Media Conference



I love what Gav said. We're still with each other, playing in the last game of the year, so it's fun.

Q. I know you both are focused on taking things one step at a time in your own game, what does it mean to potentially be able to bring home double national titles in men's and women's hockey?

JOE PALODICHUK: Yeah, huge credit to the women's team, what they've accomplished this year. We're pretty close with them. So very happy for them.

It would mean a lot. I think for the school, everyone in the program, alumni, all the players and staff, it would be amazing.

GAVIN MORRISSEY: Yeah, I would say the same thing. There's so many people that are behind the scenes that do so much work that we want to win for them, too, as well as the guys in the locker room.

Like you said, with the women's team, what they've done, is so impressive over the last however many years. Just to catch up with them a little bit would be great.

MIKE HASTINGS: I think the guys said it all. When you get an opportunity to walk the halls of the Kohl Center, be around Mark and his staff, his athletes, how they handle a tremendous amount of success with humility is incredibly impressive.

It's teachable moments there, too, from the coaching staffs down to our players. There's a good relationship there. So yeah, it would mean something very special to a lot of people.

Q. You talked about the women's team at Wisconsin having so much success. How do you feel about carrying the banner for the Big Ten, the fact you're going up against the NCHC which has had so much success in this event?

GAVIN MORRISSEY: Yeah, honestly there's a little bit of conference pride involved. At this point in the season, I don't think we ever really think of it as Big Ten versus

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Wisconsin. Who has the first question?

Q. Coach, you played 17 games against ranked opponents this season, 13 against top 10 opponents. How did the strength of your schedule this season contribute getting you to this moment?

MIKE HASTINGS: Well, a lot of teachable moments, some good, some maybe not so good. We're appreciative of our conference, what it does for us to prepare us for this time of the year. I mean, from top to bottom, you've got to play well in a conference to win hockey games. As I've said multiple times, if you don't, you won't get beat, you can get embarrassed. That happened a couple times this year.

For us, those experiences I think kind of sharpened the sword for when you get to this time.

Q. Gavin and Joe, with this late-season turnaround this team has made, is part of it being able to handle success better? Can you speak to what does that mean to you?

GAVIN MORRISSEY: Yeah, like Coach said, there's a lot of teachable moments along the way. I think as we've gone along, we've learned how to handle success better, failures as well.

As far as what it means, it's always nice to have some more time to spend with your teammates. We're enjoying every moment we have together.

JOE PALODICHUK: Yeah, you have peaks and valleys. I think there's a lot of teachable moments.



whichever conference it may be.

We kind of treat each team as a different opponent. That's kind of all of it.

Q. Joe, I wondered if you could reflect a little bit, nothing like this happens without the journey that goes back to last summer, last off-season, really even the word Coach used the word 'autopsy' and how you emerge from that and get better?

JOE PALODICHUK: I think with a lot of conversation, strength coach, Thomas Inkrott, obviously Coach, knowing I want to come back for my junior year, develop that way.

I love talking about the summer because we're there for eight weeks. We grind. We have fun together. It's a journey, and it's a fun one. I just love spending the eight weeks together to create a bond and really just come together as a family even before the season starts. It's very special.

Q. Gavin, faceoffs are one of your calling cards. What have been the keys for you winning them individually but also as a team?

GAVIN MORRISSEY: Yeah, we work on it a lot. There's a lot of preparation in the week leading up to games that goes into it. But also it's not just the centers. We have good centers all the way down our lineup, but our wingers are very active on faceoffs. Even our D, too, when they need to get in, they do a good job of helping out, grabbing loose pucks.

It may come down as an individual stat, but it's really a collective effort from the whole team.

Q. What do you think about tonight? What are the thoughts as you leave this building and go about your business and be with the family that is the team? What are you going to talk about tomorrow? You don't give away all your secrets, but what's the speech?

JOE PALODICHUK: I think just enjoying it as a family. The 26 guys in the room and the staff, just really enjoying being a part of one another, being a Badger family, just focusing on one day at a time.

Tomorrow will come soon enough. But just to be together and enjoy dinner tonight with one another, share each other's company is what we're looking forward to today.

GAVIN MORRISSEY: Yeah, just what Joe said. It's always a blessing to have more time to spend with your teammates. We're just going to enjoy the heck out of it,

worry about tomorrow when it comes.

THE MODERATOR: Coach?

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, we'll do a little bit of prep after dinner tonight. That's about it. There's a lot of hay in the barn. Tremendous amount of respect for Denver and what they bring. Again, over the last few weeks here, you've just got to find a way.

I don't think you draw it up on a board and say this is what you have to do. They're too good. They're too deep.

Most teams play best when they're not thinking, so... Let them go out and play.

Q. Mike, what does making a national title game do for visibility? For the players, is that something you have talked about in the locker room as a group in terms of the pride maybe that comes and being the group that's gotten Wisconsin back to a national title game?

MIKE HASTINGS: It means a tremendous amount. Just seeing the flood of texts, appreciation, support. I'm going to say this. From day one the community, the alumni, everybody that's about Wisconsin hockey, they were there right away.

So just like our group here, they've been with us through some peaks and some valleys because we've definitely in year two got nicked up a little bit.

To see when we were pulling in, not just Wisconsin people, but what a celebration of a college hockey game right now.

To be able to hop on a bus, have those guys walk down that corridor of people that just love college hockey, I think it's something incredibly special. We're a part of it.

The bonus we want from it is just keep sharing the idea that it's a journey for these young people. I've already seen some guys that their season was done and they're onto the next.

The guys are enjoying this. I hope our entire university, our alumni base, because they're a huge part of it. They're the ones that have laid the bricks before this group. The coaches that were there before me. The expectations. They're all good.

It's important when you have people that are with you in the down times that they can enjoy it a little bit in this journey with us. Hopefully we can continue to push the envelope tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Gavin? What's the talk among the

boys?

GAVIN MORRISSEY: It's really exciting for all of us. Joe and I are roommates back in Madison. The amount of times we've sat on the couch late at night talking about our goals for not only this team but for the program as well. Like, it's been such a journey for us to get here. We're really proud of what we've accomplished so far.

At the end of the day, like, this is where we wanted to be in the summer when we were talking about this at home. It sure means a whole lot that we've been able to get here.

THE MODERATOR: Joe, the Frozen Four growing up, did you watch any of it? Any memories come to mind?

JOE PALODICHUK: On the Frozen Four piece, of course you just watch hockey as a kid growing up. I just love being a Badger. This school, being around everyone at the college, the alumni, teammates, it just means so much.

Gavin said it. We sit on the couch and we talk about what it means, how grateful we are. I just love being a part of this, this journey and this team. It really means a lot.

Q. Joe, Coach just talked about the peaks and the valleys the program has gone through. Does that make this moment more special?

JOE PALODICHUK: I think each year's its own year, right? I think this year is special in itself. Last year was last year. My freshman year was the freshman year.

But it is nice - I've said it - being with this team, being on this run and this journey. That's kind of the biggest focus that we have and I have.

I mean, that's kind of all I'm really thinking about.

THE MODERATOR: Do you know it's Bruno Mars Day here?

JOE PALODICHUK: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Anybody know any Bruno Mars songs?

GAVIN MORRISSEY: Grenade. I know that one.

Q. In the vein of what coach said about playing and not thinking, how long did it take you guys to get into calm-down mode yesterday after the win? How much of the game did you watch between Denver and Michigan?

GAVIN MORRISSEY: I felt we were as a team were able to get into the game pretty quick. For me at least, when you get back there, it kind of starts to feel like every other game.

It felt natural starting the game at least. Then after it was great to enjoy the win for a little bit with the guys, then get back to the hotel. We were able to catch most of that game together. Yeah, a busy day. Plenty of watching we did. We did it together, too.

THE MODERATOR: Joe, were you awake at the end of the game?

JOE PALODICHUK: I was, yes (smiling).

Gavin said it great on the hockey piece. I think just being able to see family, the loved ones that came out to watch, after the game, see them, that was very special for me. I have a lot of family here. After the game, I could catch up with them was nice.

THE MODERATOR: Hasty, were you still up?

MIKE HASTINGS: I was. Same thing with the guys. That people that have supported them over the time that they've been here, I do think it's an important piece, too, I know they spend a lot of time together, they I have much value that, but we try, as I'm sure every other program does, to give them time for the people that have spent the money and have been there for them a long time before we won a game last night.

They've been able to do that. It's been great.

I will say this. I want to say thank you to The Palms and what our setup is there. To give insight, they've given us a room for the guys have not to be just locked up in their hotel rooms. Coaches appreciate it. If they're locked up in their hotel rooms, they either want to get to the pool or the tables downstairs. That's probably not a great path to rest and relaxation.

The setup at the palms for us has been fantastic. We really appreciate the forethought in making sure that the guys have a place, if they're not going to be with their family, away from it, they're with their family on the team. It's very important because it's no different than when we're at home.

I think that's a real important piece.

But yeah, last night I had an opportunity to see my family and some friends that came. We all kind of got back together back at the hotel and the guys went to bed at a

good time, and so did their coach.

Q. You played them last year. Do you take anything from that series? Anything carry over in terms of prescouts or motivation?

JOE PALODICHUK: I answered earlier with last year was last year, this year's a new year. I think it's kind of the same way.

They're a great hockey team. But yeah, we'll cut it up, look at it for tomorrow's game. That's all we're thinking about.

GAVIN MORRISSEY: I'd say pretty much the same thing.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the players go. Thank you.

We'll continue with questions for Coach Hastings.

Q. Sorry to bring this up, but it's a personal rematch from '22 with you and David. Is this just something us knuckleheads talk about because it's a cool story, or is there anything out of that game you take, tendencies, motivation for revenge, anything from that?

MIKE HASTINGS: I hope you don't mind this, but I'm going to be honest with you. No. Again, I've said enough. The amount of respect that I have for David, how he runs his program, Denver University. To get to this moment, it's difficult, right? A lot of it is focusing on yourself. You control what you get to control. We've asked our guys to do that. I'm going to do the same thing.

It was a moment that I look back and I learned from a lot of different things from then. As far as that impacting tomorrow, no.

Q. Coach, in the day and age of instant need, demand for success, is three years your timeline, ahead of schedule, or just less the process take its course?

MIKE HASTINGS: Anybody I think that tells you they've got a timeline, other than the owner of the Vegas Knights...

I don't think us coaches think that far ahead. You go in and you put together some ideas on how you want to attack. I was fortunate to be in a spot at MSU where I came into a program as a head coach, first-time head coach in college, and went through the bumps and grinds of that.

I mean, actually at this time you're going along for the ride. They're the ones driving the bus. This group's been special. Now, I'm not going to say we haven't had our headaches together and some of those valleys. That's what makes this so special, you know?

I haven't been a part of too many 32-1 teams. Mark Johnson can say that (smiling). But I can't.

I don't think there's a timeline you put on it. What you want to do is stay in the moment, squeeze as much juice as you can out of that grape. For us it's now we're onto the next one.

I appreciate the guys talking and being open with you about their process, how they kind of go about it. I think that's a good way that we're going to continue to go about this for tomorrow.

Q. Going back to just let 'em play, don't think too much. How did that manifest itself in today's practice? Was it Denver-specific stuff or last time together, get the legs?

MIKE HASTINGS: I want to give a shout-out to Jerry York. He sent me a text last said. He said, his journey, he's had a lot of these. I can tell you, I've had one previous to this. He was kind enough.

He says, Enjoy tomorrow's practice. We always thought it was the best practice of the year. Then he put "...". It was hard to schedule that one.

It sets you back, gives you an idea of perspective. I told the guys before we started, it wasn't anything specific with Denver. Again, based upon we just haven't run that that way. It's been about us when we get to that practice before the game.

With us having a little bit of downtime, to me it's about us having energy tomorrow because we're going to need a lot of it.

We went out for a short period of time. They had a lot to do with what we were doing in practice. I went to the leadership group and said, Here are some ideas I've got. What are you guys feeling?

They this had input into that. It was a good 25-minute skate.

THE MODERATOR: York, he's a good man.

MIKE HASTINGS: He's been good to me.

Q. Obviously you said you're always focusing on yourself going into tomorrow. The performance Johnny Hicks had last night, you've seen firsthand the goaltending that Denver has. Can you talk about that aspect of their game, how maybe you're trying to

address that.

MIKE HASTINGS: I'm looking at the same thing you're looking: he doesn't lose a lot of hockey games.

I appreciate the idea that you're giving it to the goaltenders. I have all the respect for the goaltenders that they've had, they've played really well at big moments. So have their teams.

He's a big part of their team just like Daniel is a big part of ours. You can't argue with the numbers. I haven't seen numbers like that in a while. I don't even know if I have at this time. When a guy that goes in for somebody that's injured, pick up the ball the way he did...

We'll talk about him, but it's not going to be the only thing. They're going to have another 20-plus doing their gig, so... That's about it.

Q. What would it mean to you as a Wisconsin coach to bring home the double titles?

MIKE HASTINGS: It would make a lot of alumni happy, I can tell you that (smiling).

You know what, I'll say this, the two opportunities I've had to be hired as a college coach, you know what you don't want to do, you don't want to disappoint the people that hired you because they put themselves on the line to hire you, right? You want to go out and do that first and foremost for them on the idea of just trying to get the program to where they envision where we should be.

But then the more important piece is the internal side. The amount of work that my staff does on a daily basis, today, last night, staying here while we go back to the hotel and decompress a little bit, they're grinding.

Nate LaPoint is Hall of Famer equipment manager, he's done it at a lot of levels. I don't know how we still keep him away from the NHL. It's just the people.

To me, it's a piece of giving back. That's something that I think is really special. It's the same thing with the guys. All the work that those guys have put in, going through the valleys, it's a great life-teaching moment for these young people to see what they can accomplish when they're selfless and they decide to do something greater for others than just themselves and what they get out of it.

From that standpoint as a coach, you're a part of it. It would be special, but it's special because of how it impacts all the other people.

Q. I wonder from the perspective you have now, the place you're at, can you reflect on early last off-season when you do that autopsy and go through the things you know have to be better and change, the personnel. How many of the boxes got checked off? How far along into the season did all that happen?

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, we had some real hard conversations. I'm talking myself and some individuals. As you guys know now, they're the ones with the hammer in their hand. They can come in, if that meeting doesn't go well, they don't like what you're saying, they're not buying in, they're gone. We had some I'll just say pretty honest conversations with some different guys.

They signed up for the work. One guy that I think going through peaks and valleys, I know people like to tie us because we're together at Minnesota State, you look at Christian Fitzgerald, Simon Tassy, him scoring a really important goal last night. Boy, has he seen some peaks and valleys.

We had a tough conversation last year. It was really open and honest about do we think this is still a good fit for each other. What he puts it forth and says, I'm all in, how can you not back that up?

Now, you sit there, When? You hope he's prepared for the moment. And he was. It's because of all the work that he puts in.

It's a scary time for all the coaches right now that are still in this tournament because we turn the page on Sunday/Monday. Portal opens up.

Right now I love that those guys are saying they just want to keep staying together. At the end of the this journey, we'll address what we have to address because that's our jobs on their part and our part.

Yeah, it was a hard early end to our season last year, so we had time. Right now we don't have time. But this group, they're all in. I think they've been rewarded for that.

Q. Mike, I know on the PK, a couple bounces go against you against Michigan State. What have you seen structure-wise, effort-wise that's been better stopping pucks before they can get to your goaltender on a PK?

MIKE HASTINGS: Wasn't a great recipe for success going down five-on-three for almost a full two minutes. All the time you put in, the guys have worked on what they need to work on, if you're going to kill penalties, you need really good goaltending and we got it. You need a lot of

selflessness. You saw our captain lay out and take an absolute seed in an area that wasn't protected and continued to fight through it.

There's moments in games that you don't get to dictate as a coach. That goes back to them playing and not thinking. But a lot of it, when you talk about penalty kill, is can you find a way to make sure they don't get a puck over your goal line. That might be on an entry or a stick that gets on a puck that doesn't go through the royal road and go dot to dot in the back of the net.

There's a lot of things that go into it. At the end of the day you have to go execute. I think a lot of that for pit crews is goaltending.

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