

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Troy vs Nebraska

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## Nebraska Cornhuskers Coach Fred Hoiberg

Media Conference



Important in these early games of getting off to a good start, and we're going to have a great crowd here, and we need to get our fans behind us early in this one.

We're excited to be here and excited for the opportunity to compete.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Fred, how have your guys handled the extra attention that is obviously on them with the history they're trying to make with this program?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, they've handled it well, and they've handled it well all season. It's been one of the things I've been most impressed with this group is how they've handled adversity and how they've been able to get over, whether it's an emotional win or a tough, devastating loss. They've been able to put it behind them.

Coming off our last game against Purdue, a lot of it had to do with Purdue. Obviously they're rolling. They cut down the nets in Chicago. And we've got an opportunity to reset and regroup and talk about a lot of things heading into this time of year.

So, you know, they've handled the adversity well. I guess to answer your question, very well as a team all season. Nebraska is 0-8 all-time, but none of these players were part of the seven before two years ago in Memphis where we had three guys. They talked about it. They got a little bit caught up in the hoopla. There's a lot of things going on this time of year, and the team that puts up their walls and blocks out the noise, I think, has the best chance of advancing.

Our guys, I think, have done a solid job of that.

**Q. How big could the crowd be, though? You've played in this arena. You know how loud it can get. Even with 11:40 tip-off, how big an impact could that make in this game?**

FRED HOIBERG: It will be huge. I'm guessing that caravan is coming down from Lincoln from the entire state, all the alum that will show up. They did it in Memphis a couple of years ago. It helps. Obviously it helps at this

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Fred Hoiberg, Head Coach for Nebraska. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Hoiberg and then get to questions.

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, we're really excited to be here in Oklahoma City. Great arena. Unbelievable fan base here in OKC. Just the opportunity to compete at this time of year, this is to me what it's all about, going all the way back to our early workouts in June when we put this group together, all the work that they put in with the strength coach, the early mornings, the ups and downs, the highs and lows that you go through over your journey. It's all designed for this time of year.

This is the fun time of the season, and our guys have done an unbelievable job this year of keeping their focus, really have done a good job of not getting ahead of themselves. We understand what's at stake at this time of year and what's at stake for Nebraska.

I know the first question is going to be Nebraska has never won a tournament game. We realize that. Have I talked to our players about it? No, I haven't. They know. They see it. Is there a pressure that goes along with that? Of course, there is.

But as I've said to the team, pressure is a privilege. It's what it's all about. To go out there and do the things we've been doing all year, we've prepared the same for this game as we have for every game this season, with what we've gone out and tried to accomplish to get ourselves ready to play a really good basketball team, unbelievably well-coached.

Coach Cross does an amazing job. Five 20-win seasons in a row. It's a winning culture, and they play extremely hard, and they play unselfish, and they play for each other.



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time of year, especially in the early start time. To get out there and have the energy of your fan base behind you.

Whatever happens, look, adversity is going to hit us at some point in this game tomorrow, but having a fan base like we're going to have will help us through that, but again, it's our job. It's our job to get off to a good start to get the crowd behind us, but whatever happens, we got to stick with it, we got to execute, and we have to stay disciplined.

**Q. There have been obviously some very good players at Nebraska over the years, guys like Erick Strickland or Piatkowski, guys like that, who had great careers, but never quite got that win. Have any of the great players from the past at Nebraska reached out to you to kind of emphasize the importance of this to them?**

FRED HOIBERG: I do hear from a lot of former players. That's been one of the fun things is I played against those guys back in the old Big Eight days and had some really good battles against them and have developed really good relationships with a lot of those players.

Yes, I hear from them after games. I hear from them before games. I've heard from multiple former Huskers going into this one about what it would mean to get over the hump. So, yes, it's been fun building the relationships with guys that I had a lot of great respect for just because of the type of players they were and the type of work ethic that they had.

**Q. Because of your history with the Nebraska program, how much more would it mean to you personally if you could get this night off your back and get Nebraska basketball set on a track in which everybody wants?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, it's a great question, Barry, because this program does mean a lot to me because of my family's history, and my grandfather was the head coach for nine seasons at the University of Nebraska. I was born in Lincoln. My parents both got their degrees from the University of Nebraska. I've got a lot of family in the state. My Grandpa Hoiberg was a sociology professor at Nebraska for 30 years.

This place means a lot to me. Two programs -- Iowa State and Nebraska -- and I've been fortunate to be the head coach at both places. It would mean a lot to our family. It would mean even more to our fans. Again, they're going to show up. They expect a lot out of this team, as they should.

This team has been very easy to root for all season long because of their makeup and how they've approached

everything with what you have to accomplish in your daily battles.

Yes, it would mean a lot for our family, and again, we're going to throw everything we have. It's all about competing and, again, fighting through that adversity that we have to do at this time of season if you want to advance.

**Q. Fred, can you just kind of summarize what your Nebraska tenure has been like and the build to get to this moment? Starting out a couple of tough seasons and getting it to where it's, just based on the numbers, the best season in program history?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, and we knew -- listen, we took over an enormous rebuild, obviously, with one player, with Thorir being the only player on the roster that was retained. We were really the only rebuilding team in the Big Ten at that time. I remember talking to John Beilein about that and how difficult that mountain would be to climb.

Then year two, we go through COVID, and that was a very difficult time to navigate as well. Then when we got the right players in here, started with Sam Griesel and Emmanuel Bandoumel, I give those two guys a lot of credit. Juwan and Derrick Walker were huge parts of that as well. And then you get Josiah Allick and you get Keisei, and you get a lot of players that really helped flip the narrative of Nebraska basketball.

So, yes, those first couple of years were rough, and we knew that what we took over, it would take some time, especially back then, that was before NIL, so you couldn't really buy a team.

So, yeah, it took us some time to get here, but again, it was all about getting the right players in here, especially the ones that the fans could get behind.

That team that was .500 with Griesel, I think if Juwan and Emmanuel stayed healthy, who knows what would have happened. That team was an easy one to pull for. That's when really we started moving this thing in the right direction.

Sam has been instrumental in getting us to this point as well with helping build chemistry off the court, which I think is very important, when you're out there battling, to have a care factor for the guys sitting next to you.

These guys have been all about the right things. We're not the most talented group. We're not the most athletic group, but for the most part, we've been the most together group.

**Q. You laid out your family's history with the**

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**University of Nebraska. You're obviously well aware of the great history of the Nebraska football program. What does it mean to you to bring some of that energy to the basketball program?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I know that I was a die-hard Husker football fan growing up, like to the point where I would have a meltdown if they got beat in their games, which didn't happen very often back then.

Not only that, but the volleyball program, for what they've accomplished. Amy Williams being in the tournament again this year. Rhonda Revelle with the softball; Will Bolt, I could go down the line, Mark Manning with wrestling.

It's an honor to be part of this athletic program, just the type of people that are leading their respective programs and the way the fans show up for them. When you go to a baseball game or a softball game, there's no empty seats. It's the same thing with Pinnacle Bank Arena.

So the energy that our fans have brought to really help us get over the hump and have some key, signature wins, our fans have played a huge part in that, and it's fun to share the journey when you go through that with the fans that have been so supportive.

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