

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Fred Hoiberg

Reink Mast

Pryce Sandfort

Jamarcus Lawrence

Sam Hoiberg

Media Conference



We did a great job of moving the ball, playing simple basketball. This team forces a lot of turnovers. You can't play in a crowd against them. I thought a couple early we turned it over but then got back to who we are.

Just really proud of these guys. Happy to get this win for the first one in the history of the program. Most wins in a single season in the history of the program, but we can't be satisfied.

We got to move past it. I asked the guys, as I do after every win, are you satisfied? They said, no. Got to get over it quickly. We'll have a film session tonight on whoever we will face in the next round, but couldn't be more proud of our guys.

The last thing I want to say is that was as loud and vocal of a neutral site game as I have ever played in. It's amazing. We went out for the anthem. We had a little monitor in the coach's room. You could kind of see it filling in, filling in. When I went out for the anthem, I got goose pumps and got a little emotional seeing how the fans showed up for us, and they were a huge factor in that thing. When we went on a run, it was deafening in there.

Just really thankful we could share this moment with our unbelievable fans, and I promise you, we're going to keep fighting and keep swinging.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Question for Pryce. How is it like finding out that your brother actually was able to make it to the game even though he played last night in Brooklyn, New York.

PRYCE SANDFORT: He was lying to me this whole week. He told had he he wasn't going to be able to make it. I'm telling everybody that. I'm telling the media that. Then he shows up and I see him in the stands ten minutes before the game.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

PRYCE SANDFORT: That's right, first time he had points last night and showed up for this game.

Nebraska 76, Troy 47

THE MODERATOR: Please welcome Coach Hoiberg and student-athletes Rienk Mast, Pryce Sandfort, Jamarques Lawrence and Sam Hoiberg. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Hoiberg and get to questions.

FRED HOIBERG: Really proud of our guys. I thought they were extremely locked in this week going into this first game of the tournament. We talked a lot about that after the disappointment in the Big Ten Tournament playing against Purdue. We had to get over that one.

We learned from it. We had a pretty vocal film session that following morning and then moved on to Troy. There was a lot of anxiety going into this game with a team that was playing very good basketball coming off a conference championship. Teams are always dangerous in this one-and-done format.

They came out and hit shots early. We talked about the importance of getting off to a fast start, but if it didn't happen, we had to keep our emotions. I thought we got a little bit out of sorts and out of character in the Big Ten game, but I thought we got right back to who we are today. 20 assists, 6 turnovers. We forced them into 17 turnovers. Second-chance points, 19-3. Those were huge in this game. Points off turnovers were big, and then points in the paint.

Yeah, it was unreal seeing him up there and the support we got I got from my family, but just the whole crowd in general. That might have been the best environment I've ever played in, you home, neutral, away. It was truly unbelievable.

Our fan base is just incredible, and we're so blessed to play in front of these fans.

Q. For you three seniors, with the way that the game kind of got in control towards the end, at what point did you kind of let the moment soak it in for this being your goal for a long time now? At what point did you allow yourself to sit back and appreciate it?

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, there was a few times where I was trying to really soak it in. I think two years ago that was one of the issues I was trying to soak in everything the entire time. I didn't focus. I didn't play a good game in the NCAA Tournament two years ago.

That's one of the things I was saying to our guys all week is know you're playing in a dream moment right now, but we have to focus on this game and get this win, because it can get out of hand quick.

You know, with about five minutes left, I think we were up by 30, and went into a timeout. That's when you start looking up at the crowd and seeing their reactions. Yeah, it was a special feeling being able to kind of cherish that.

JAMARQUES LAWRENCE: Yeah, we talked yesterday about this. We've been here before, us three. Like Sam was saying, we were just caught up in the rah-rah, wasn't focused really. Just made sure we came in and locked in on one game at a time.

For me, it was about the six-minute mark. I kind of knew I wasn't getting back in. I'm, like, all right, I can kind of just chill, relax, and just soak in it the moment. Yeah, this is a great feeling.

RIENK MAST: Kind of same for me. Once the five-minute mark hit and you know, hey, this one is in the pocket. Yeah, it's pretty special. You start looking around and just the amount of smiles you see everywhere in the crowd, it was truly special.

Q. Pryce, you had seven threes. When did you realize that you were kind of locked in, that you were going to be on one today? How much did having your brother here kind of help you, give you that extra maybe motivation or boost?

PRYCE SANDFORT: . . . I hit a couple early. I felt really

locked in in warm-ups. I give credit to my teammates, coaches putting me in the right spots, giving me the ball on time, on target. That's what really got me going, and that's what it is every game.

These guys are looking for me in transition off offensive rebounds. You know, they give me great passes. So with Peyton, like seeing him out there, really special. I think he's only been to, like, one game this year. Getting him to come to this game and getting him back, it was really special.

Q. Sam, what do you think allowed kind of the dam to break for you guys in the first half? Kind of close early, then it became pretty evident what was going to happen. What was going on that allowed that?

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, it was one of those games where you kind of felt, like, the shots, they hit some really tough shots, and there were things that we could have done better to takeaway those threes.

We felt like they were making tough shots that couldn't really last the entirety of the game. So I had a feeling that we were going to get some stops, and that's been the theme all year. When we get stops, that's when we go on runs offensively.

As soon as we started getting stops on defense, we started getting the offense rolling. Obviously having Pryce having as many threes in the first half was huge. It's all about getting stops and then we run a lot better offense out of that.

Q. For Sam and Jamarques, you guys knew you would have the home court advantage today, but did it surprise you just the environment given how loud it was, all the Nebraska fans here?

JAMARQUES LAWRENCE: Just really wasn't surprising. I knew it was going to be loud and packed. Really we just got to see it in the moment. Like what Coach said, kind of got a little chills as well and came out for the anthem, it was crazy.

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, I agree. I knew it was going to be a home court advantage for us, but just the energy they bring, you could tell that was a desperate crowd, desperate for a tournament win, and we were a desperate team, so it worked well together.

Q. For Sam, you were here obviously over your long career, and you saw some rough starts too your first couple of seasons. When you summarize everything you've been through through these last five years,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

what can you just kind of come to a conclusion of from seeing where it started to where it is now and with your dad winning the program's first NCAA Tournament. Just talk about that journey.

SAM HOIBERG: It's almost like a storybook ending getting this tournament win, because I've been saying all week it kind of felt like the last thing that we needed to do to get this program on top, I guess are.

Yeah, it was tough being on those teams that were not winning games, especially when I was on the bench. I used that as motivation when I was in the gym by myself getting shots up, stuff like that.

So just being able to reap the benefit of all of the things we've done this season has been unbelievable.

Q. Jamarques we talked yesterday. You said in a little bit of a shooting slump. Well, you maybe came out of it a little bit today. How did it feel to see the ball go in today?

JAMARQUES LAWRENCE: It felt amazing. All week my teammates and coaches, they instilled the most confidence in me all year, but it's one thing. It's not about me scoring the basketball. I know I can impact the game in many ways. My job is to still be that vocal leader, to keep the team positive.

Like I said, I knew it was a new season right now. All my stats before, it doesn't matter. But that was definitely great to see the ball go through.

Q. For any of you guys, after the game you all ran over to Kent Pavelka and crowded around him to help him celebrate. Why was that important to acknowledge him?

RIENK MAST: He's been here for so long. I talked to him before the season. He's, like, this is the only thing that he still hasn't seen. So, yeah, just for him being with the program for so long, we're so happy for him to also be able to experience this and be able to be here for that.

SAM HOIBERG: I didn't go over there. Now that you mentioned that, I can't wait to go see Kent after this. Yeah, I mean, he deserves this win as much as anybody. I fully expect to see him crying or something out of happiness when we see him. But yeah, getting that win for him is special.

Q. Fred, what is the challenge now to kind of get off this high and regroup for a game on Saturday?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I mean, I'm confident our guys will do what they've done all year. This is the most emotional of all of them. Was for me. You talk to the players about when they got sort of soaking it in. I think there was 1:13 left and both benches were empty. It was. It's emotional for me. I think of my dad who is in a home right now. I hope he got a chance to watch this one. I can't wait to talk to him just because of what it means for our family. It is emotional. There's no doubt about it.

These guys all year long have moved on. They've been so resilient. They've gotten over big ones. They've gotten over tough losses. I'm confident that they're going to do that again and be locked in. We always talk about the next thing. The next thing is a film session tonight after the recovery. These guys love sitting in the cold tubs, which our strength coaches are filling those up with ice right now.

They're going to get the rovers, and then we're going to get back and have a really good film session tonight. We're going to play a great team, whoever wins this next one. I know our guys are going to be locked in and we'll have a good walk-through, put in the game plan tomorrow, and guard it a little bit.

Then I don't know what time we're going to play obviously on Saturday, so we'll get our game time. If we get a shoot Aron, another opportunity, great. If not, we will do a walk-through in the hotel. I promise you, our guys will be locked in.

Q. Coach, how big was Braden Frager's impact, the energy that he provided? Sam talked about being the more desperate team. How did Braden Frager impact you in the way that you guys played?

FRED HOIBERG: I thought Braden played with unbelievable energy and purpose today. I told him at halftime keep shooting it, and he did. But we need that. We need Braden aggressive. We need him shooting the ball. I thought he made a huge impact on the other end.

I thought defensively he had great hands. He was all over the place. He rebounded it. I just was really happy for him, because I know how much it means for everybody. The local guys, Braden grew up dreaming of this moment, growing up in Lincoln.

These guys, it's turned into their home. For Rienk being from across the pond and Jamarques being from all the way on the East Coast. It's really turned into a home for these guys. A lot of it's because of the fans. They make them feel so comfortable and so welcomed. Pryce grew up next door. He grew up a Husker fan, and Sam was pissed when I took this job because he wanted to live in Chicago

for a couple more years.

We get him there, and he sees what this thing is all about.
Yeah, I don't remember what you asked me, but it was --
Frager, yeah. Braden was awesome.

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