

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Nebraska vs Vanderbilt

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

## Nebraska Cornhuskers

## Fred Hoiberg

## Pryce Sandfort

## Rienk Mast

## Sam Hoiberg

## Braden Frager

### Media Conference

Nebraska 74, Vanderbilt 72

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Nebraska student-athletes Pryce Sandfort, Rienk Mast, Sam Hoiberg, and Braden Frager, and Head Coach Fred Hoiberg.

We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

FRED HOIBERG: I'm too tired. Let's go.

Actually, I'll say this. If we need to find a way to bring Effie the ghost to Houston with us. I think she had a little part in that last play.

I'm appreciative of these guys. Everybody in that locker room has played a big role in the season, in where we are.

My hat's off to Vanderbilt. That's a hell of a team. Unbelievably well-coached. Those guys play hard, they pressure. Very difficult on a one-day prep to get the game plan put in, but our guys got off to great start. I thought that was very important. We did a good job getting our fans into the game.

Then we withstood their run. They went on a big run. We knew they would at some point in the game. As we talked going in this tournament, if you want to advance, it's all about how you handle adversity, and our guys did a masterful job of hanging in there. Things weren't looking great, but it was still a one or two-possession game. I think



they got up five at one point and had a couple of big put-backs, one by Sam, one by Rienk after not doing much on the offensive glass all game. Pryce's play to Braden at the end of the game was unbelievable with nine seconds left.

The question, do you call the timeout? But I thought we had numbers. They all ran at Pryce, probably rightfully so, with what he does offensively, and he just made a great play to Braden, and Braden did the rest.

Really proud of our guys. That last shot, man, it just took my breath away. That kid is an unbelievable player. When that thing was up in the air. I was, like, oh, man, that's going in. Then hit every part of the rim. Thankfully bounced out, and we're looking forward to next week, getting the opportunity to continue to compete.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. You talked all season about this team's ability to handle adversity, especially in the second half where there were so many kind of potential turning points for this thing to go the other way. I guess can you just talk about how proud you are about their resilience with all those moments?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I thought they were very resilient. A lot of that was, you know, we had to battle and continue to fight. We put them in the bonus early in the half. You know, we were getting a little frustrated out there and found a way to regroup. We talked in the huddle. We still had a lead. I think it was 11 minutes when we called it. There was a timeout. I said, guys, look up there, we still have the lead. We're not doing great right now. Hang in there. We'll get it going again. Changed up our defense. Threw a little zone out there, which I think threw off their rhythm a little bit.

They crushed us on the glass in the second half. We have to do a better job. Whoever we're going to play in the next round, you know, we got to do a better job on the glass if we want to continue to play.

Yeah, just really gritty effort by our guys. Thankful to continue to be able to coach these guys going into next



weekend.

**Q. Fred, I imagine you anticipated their pressure, their defensive pressure. What was your instruction to the guys? How do you feel they executed?**

FRED HOIBERG: Don't throw it to them was what we talked to them about. We did a little bit too much of that. How many turnovers? I didn't bring my glasses. We had 12. Against that team that's one of the top -- Miles is fourth in the nation in steal percentage. Tanner is top 30 as well in steal percentage.

They make you play a different way. We were very efficient. I think we shot 55 or 56% when we were able to get a shot on the board. But again, that's a really good team. They're top-10 offense and a top-30 defense. For us to come out of here with a win is huge.

The crowd, once again, was an unbelievable factor. I think they're all driving down to Houston in the morning. We expect another big turnout again next weekend.

**Q. Braden, walk us through that last sequence from your perspective.**

BRADEN FRAGER: I mean, I saw I think all five guys ran at Pryce, and I think everybody expected him to shoot that. I was calling for the ball. It was all him. He made the unselfish play, and I had wide open lane to the rim, and I just went and made a play.

**Q. Braden, you grew up a Husker fan, Lincoln native. You just secured Nebraska's first-ever berth into the Sweet 16. What does this mean to you?**

BRADEN FRAGER: It's an unbelievable feeling. It couldn't be done without all these guys up here, all these guys on the team. We had a great crowd. I feel like they carried us a lot through this, and that was a big part of it. We stuck together when we got down late there and I think that's what we've been doing all year, sticking together, and that's what makes us so special.

**Q. Pryce, we heard from Braden. We heard from your coach about what that moment was like, that game-winning moment. Can you kind of walk us through the play from your perspective?**

PRYCE SANDFORT: Came down with the rebound. I can't remember who missed the shot, but I got it, saw some numbers that we had, and came off that ball screen. Saw Braden standing there wide open. He was screaming at me for the ball. I knew he was about to go make a play.

But, yeah, he had a wide open lane and made an incredible finish. Super proud of this team. Super proud of our guys. Yeah, just unbelievable game.

**Q. Sam, just the emotions of that game with how physical it was and just the way that it finished, but then also how emotionally charged the crowd was. I mean, how did you as players keep your composure throughout that kind of unprecedented setting?**

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, I mean, that was a tough game, because they're such a good team. That's as much as we've been pressured all season long, and that wears you out mentally and physically. I was feeling pretty gassed there a few times before the media timeout.

It was tough to stay mentally strong, and I think having a crowd like this is super important for carrying us through some of those times. This is a really mentally tough team. We were in one of the last media timeouts, we were down a couple of points. I was really tired. I thought back to the summer workouts. That's the reason we did this was for this time of the year to stay mentally tough.

Shout-out Kurt Joseph for that, but yeah, it was a physical game. Really good team. I'm just really proud of everyone staying together. That's what we've done all year.

**Q. What is now your schedule? Uncharted waters for the program. You guys fly back tonight. How do you kind of turn the page and move on knowing you're going to be playing Thursday night?**

FRED HOIBERG: We're flying back home at 11:00 tomorrow. We're staying overnight, and we'll get back, regroup, find out who we're going to play after the game. I think they play tomorrow night, if I'm not mistaken, Iowa and Florida. Start working right away. Getting a game plan put together. Don't know if we'll play Thursday or Friday, and we'll just take it from there.

The beauty of this game was, more than anything, I don't have to buy him a birthday present, him or his brother, after this one.

Yeah, we'll know more after we figure out who we're going to play and what time.

**Q. For Sam and Rien, you guys finished with 10 assists and only one turnover against a pressure defense. What were you guys seeing that allowed you to be unselfish and make plays and get numbers into the paint?**

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, I mean, like I said, it was really

tough. I don't know if I've been picked like that all year by Tanner, but he was just really good at getting up under you, and he's quick to stay in front. Getting Rienk out to set some high ball screens was important to alleviate some of that pressure. Then guys were making good cuts, good slips. Got a couple of assists on those.

Yeah, it was just about making smart plays, because you knew that was their biggest emphasis was to take care of the ball. Yeah, I mean, to be able to execute that in this game was huge.

REINK MAST: Yeah, for me I knew the guards were going to have a lot of pressure on them, so I always try to help them out. Even there was a high ball screen or if they throw it to me, and I can kind of dictate the offense from there.

But like Sam said, there were some amazing cuts, and sometimes a guy was just wide open. Those are pretty easy assists. That's just credit to the way we cut. It makes it pretty easy for me to hit the open guy.

**Q. To the players, guys, what was going through your head when you saw that ball go in and out at the end?**

SAM HOIBERG: My heart sank as that ball went in the hoop and went out. I think it took me a half a second to register it didn't go in, and then I just screamed in elation. I thought it was in.

BRADEN FRAGER: I had a perfect shot on it from the bench, and I was, like -- I just froze for two seconds. I thought it went in. I didn't know how to react. I was, just -- everybody started celebrating. I was, like, he actually missed it, so...

PRYCE SANDFORT: I just about died. I was on the side, so I didn't know the angle it was on. I just want to thank the good Lord Jesus Christ for that one.

REINK MAST: Yeah, like, just went completely blank. Like Braden said, just on the bench we had a perfect view. It was right on line, and it just luckily rolled out.

**Q. Rienk, started hot from three. I believe you made your first three of four. What were you seeing early from beyond the arc, especially with how Pryce was just getting smothered?**

REINK MAST: We saw in film that they were going to try and top lock him or really pressure him, so we talked about him either flaring me, and I got some open looks early. Because we saw that on film, like yesterday I took a lot of shots that we thought I was going to get open shots in, and

those were the shots -- exactly the shots that we got. I was ready and knocked them down.

That was great prep and great scouting report on the coaching staff.

**Q. Fred, just wanted to ask you about Rienk. The way he facilitates, the way he's in a lot of plays late, and also just this year coming back from what he came back from and to play the way he has this year.**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, you know, I couldn't be happier for Rienk. You guys have no idea how invasive that procedure that Rienk went through. It's a full 12-month recovery. I've said this about Rienk. He's the most disciplined player that I've ever coached. If anybody is going to come back from that, it's him. We knew pretty early in the process that Rienk was going to be okay when he made seven out of eight threes against BYU in our exhibition game.

He's got the right approach. His daily approach is unlike anything I've ever seen. He had to be on point. He couldn't skip steps. There's a reason that he's back playing at this level. I don't have to worry about minute restrictions, any of that, because he handled his business after the procedure.

So just more than anything, I'm just happy for him because you see the joy. It was hard. It was hard for Rienk to sit out last year and not be a part of it, especially when we went through some struggles at the end of the season. To see him out here helping us have a historic season is just awesome.

**Q. You and your student-athletes have already answered a couple of questions on your team's composure in this game. Whenever I observe your personal coaching style, it's the first thing that comes to mind is composure. Where does this poise and composure come from, and do you think it's something that differentiates your team from other teams in this tournament?**

FRED HOIBERG: Well, I don't know. We all have our styles. We all have our personalities. I think you've got to be who you are. These players are smart, and we have to be who we are. We can't be frauds. It's just kind of who I am and who I've always been. I try to play that way with composure and certainly coach.

There's a lot of times behind the scenes where absolutely we'll get on them, we'll jump them. There's a couple of times today I did lose my composure I thought, but once I got back in the huddle and tried to regroup and get our

guys back in line, I knew I had to get back to myself as well.

You just got to be who you are in this profession. I've always tried to be that way.

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