

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Iowa vs Nebraska

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Houston, Texas, USA

Toyota Center

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Fred Hoiberg

Pryce Sandfort

Rienk Mast

Sam Hoiberg

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



something I'm focused on. We're treating the game as any other game. Same approach as we've had all season and just kind of block out that outside noise.

Q. Because most of the players you played with are not even there anymore?

PRYCE SANDFORT: Yeah, I did play with a couple of 'em, and I still have a lot of good relationships with some of the staff and the managers, so still see them around and talk to them. But it is a very different team. Only two players stayed. But still have good relationships with 'em.

Q. Rienk, a lot of times coaches save, like, different wrinkles and sets for post-season play. Given this is your third meeting with Iowa, how are you preparing for something new against an opponent that's so familiar?

RIENK MAST: We've kind of opened the entire playbook. Throughout the season, we've added new sets, we've gone away from some things that teams scouted. But we added everything, we've added some new stuff. So, yeah, just everything's open and we got a bunch of guys with a high basketball IQ, so that definitely helps with just having a huge amount of sets that we can go to.

Q. Sam, after you guys have accomplished what you've done winning the program's first tournament game, now the first Sweet 16 appearance, is there a sense of maybe being able to play more free now that that monkey's off the back, per se?

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, I think that kind of came off after that first game, for sure. I talked about it a lot. There was a ton of anxiety with that game, just knowing that -- especially for the seniors, like me and Rienk, if we didn't get that win, we would have never been able to come back and do it. So it was nice to get that freed off your back, but every game is super high pressure now, so just get back to doing what you did all year and preparing for the game plan and executing the best you possibly can.

Q. Last week the crowd atmosphere at the regional was unlike anything we have seen before. What are you guys expecting here with a little bit more ticket competition, and what's your message maybe to the

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

Q. Sam, how has your relationship with your dad changed since he became your coach here? And same question for your relationship with Charlie, how has that changed since he came and joined the staff?

SAM HOIBERG: I wouldn't say it's changed a whole lot. I had an amazing relationship growing up and had an amazing childhood. As far as Charlie, we've been as close as you can possibly be my entire life. Him coming back, it has just been really cool to have him be a part of it. But we've created sort of -- there's a little bit of professional relationship with how he's helped me in coaching me. I think that's probably where he's made his biggest impact is how he's helped me with my offensive production. He's been huge for that.

Then with my dad, I think we've done a great job of keeping it very player-coach relationship in practices. I don't think you would be able to tell if you came to a practice that I was his kid. We probably have grown a little bit closer bond from it all, but in general, just still had an amazing relationship growing up and it's maintained that way.

Q. Pryce, what do you think it will be like to face your former team and how do you think the Iowa fans will react to you?

PRYCE SANDFORT: I'm not really sure. It's not



Nebraska fan base coming down here?

RIENK MAST: Yeah, obviously we're a little further away from home. All the fans that I talked to in Oklahoma City all said that they wanted to try and come down here. But, yeah like you said we got some competing fan bases here, Houston's a couple miles away, so yeah there's some competition for those tickets. But for any Husker fans that have made it out here and will be in the arena, like let's try and be as loud as you can and I know Husker fans will support us no matter what.

PRYCE SANDFORT: Yeah, we have. We have one of the best fan bases in the nation, so we know that they're going to show out. I hope it can be like Oklahoma City, but that's probably hard to do, so yeah, we know that they're going to show out for us.

SAM HOIBERG: I was looking at how far Memphis was from Lincoln in comparison to here and it's pretty close, and I know how much of a crowd we had there a couple years ago so I fully expect it to be another really good crowd. Probably not to the extent of Oklahoma City, but I've said it all week, we have the greatest fans in the whole world, so expecting a great crowd.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions.

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, it's great to be here in Houston. I love this arena. I coached in it. Actually, I was in this practice facility with numerous practice times here. So it's great to be back in Houston and just really excited for the opportunity to continue to compete in this great event. Playing a really tough opponent in Iowa, was so impressed by their win over Florida and all the things that they did in that game to get the victory there at the end. We know them, they know us, and had two really highly competitive games against them this year, essentially one-possession games in both of 'em, and excited about the opportunity to compete tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. From your experience, the deeper you get into NCAA tournament play, how much of these games come down to a coach's chess match, especially against an opponent you're facing for the third time this season?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, obviously, we've got our game

plan, Iowa has theirs, and now it's all about going out and executing and figuring out a way to make adjustments if things aren't going according to plan. When you look at the two games that we played earlier this year, very -- Iowa with the way that they controlled pace and controlled tempo, I thought they did a great job with that in those first two games. They get up 10 early on Clemson and did the same thing, got a double-digit lead against Florida, and they were able to control pace and tempo for the entire game.

That was the story, I thought, in our two games as well. They do as good a job as anybody. Ben does a phenomenal job of getting his guys in the right spots with Stirtz being one of the most clutch players in this tournament and in all of college basketball. But what they're doing with Combs right now, he's handling the ball a lot as well. They're using Stirtz a little bit off the ball. The way Koch is shooting, he's shooting 54 percent over his last five with 18 made threes. Banks coming off an unbelievable game.

It's going to come down to a lot of little things. Rebounding is going to be very important in this game. It's going to be a possession battle, taking care of the basketball, very important at this time of year. With what Iowa did, having more offensive rebounds than Florida, was so unbelievably impressive. Also having 15 offensive rebounds against Clemson, I think won the battle of the glass by 13 in that game.

So they're playing their best basketball of the season. I like how we're playing right now and it should be a fun game tomorrow night.

Q. What have you learned in the limited time you've had to coach against Ben McCollum and do you feel like it's a chess match of adjustments this third time or not?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, that's obviously important. We watched the two games that we played against them, they watched the two games that they played against us. It is all about going out there and making adjustments. Again, you've got a plan, but if things aren't going according to plan, you got to be ready to adjust on the fly and hopefully your guys execute.

I thought our guys did a really good job when we switched up our defense late in the game against Vanderbilt and we found out a way to go slow down their momentum. That's what this time of year is all about. If you have any chance of advancing, you have to have great execution in everything you do on both sides of the ball.

But, yeah, Ben, he's been elite at what he's done in year one with a roster and getting the right guys that fit his system. When you have a guy like Stirtz -- that was the other impressive thing. Stirtz goes 0-9 from three and they beat the No. 1 seed and one of the best teams in the country. So they're playing at a high, high level. We're going to have to be on point. We're going to have to play as well as we have all year if we want to have a chance to win this game tomorrow and continue on and advance.

I feel good about what we -- Vanderbilt was an unbelievably quality opponent, and I thought our guys did a great job of going out there and getting off to a fast start, built a little bit of a lead, got a cushion, they made their run, and our guys did not panic. That's the other thing at this time of year, you have to handle adversity well and our guys, for the most part, all season long have done that and I think Iowa certainly has done that as well.

Q. I'm not sure how much interaction you've had with Kelvin since your playing days, but he tells us a story about having to face you on your Senior Night --

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, they whooped us.

Q. Just any just interactions that you have had with him recently or what that relationship is that you've had over the years?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah. Yeah, I did. Mark Pope and Kelvin called me. The year before when Mark was at BYU they were at media day and he was telling me the story about when they were -- when he was at Oklahoma, and they had a great team. Ryan Minor was an unbelievable player in the old Big 8 conference, and in that one, it's a game I certainly want to forget. I went 3-16 in that game. But that's Kelvin, that's his defense, that's what he's hung his hat on, that and his physicality.

We played in the same region as them two years ago, so I was able to catch up with him there as well. You know, just a really incredible quality human being. That's one thing that I know about Kelvin, and have competed against him as a player and a little bit as a coach. So just think the world of him and certainly what he's doing right now he's got a team built to cut down the nets.

Q. In the midst of this historic season, first NCAA tournament win, first appearance in the Sweet 16, have you personally been able to take just a moment to soak in what this journey and what this season has meant to you?

FRED HOIBERG: Oh, not really. It's on to the next. If you get caught up in it and if you get satisfied, you're not going

to last very long in this tournament. Again, I look back at the team that we put together all season long they found a way to move past it. Whether it's been a tough devastating loss, our guys have found a way to regroup and refocus. Or if it's been a big emotional win. That's what it was this last weekend. Did we celebrate? Absolutely we did. I think every team that's in this position right now celebrates it. But then you got to get over it and then you got to get back in the game and put a game plan together and watch a lot of film and then it's all about going out and executing everything that you put in to give you the best chance of continuing to advance in this tournament. When I look back at this journey all season long that's what's been most impressive. I think about our guys is they found a way to move on to the next assignment. Certainly this week with playing Iowa, our guys, again we know them, they know us, and we put a game plan together that hopefully will give us a chance. Now it's about going out and executing. But, yes, you have to celebrate it -- I talked about enjoying the journey you have to enjoy this process. I mean this team will be remembered forever as the first team to get that NCAA win and there's something to that. But at the same time when I ask 'em after the game are you satisfied, to a man they say no.

Q. They're saying this will probably have more of a neutral feel, but knowing Nebraska fans like you do and talking to people what's your feel for the amount of impact Nebraska fans could have and do you expect a big contingent down here in Houston?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I do. I was blown away in Oklahoma City, they absolutely 100 percent played a factor in us getting to the point where we are right now. To set an all-time decibel record -- I coached against the Thunder in that building, and when they're in there and the playoffs, that's the best atmosphere in the NBA. For our fans to break that is it just says everything you need to know. It was 98 percent Husker fans in there in that building. And when Frager hit that shot, the roof blew off the place. Then when that shot rimmed out eight times then the celebration began. It's been really special to share this journey with them because of everything that they have gone through with, you know, across all sports. For us to be able to go out there and celebrate with them I thought was really maybe a highlight of the season for our team, just because of everything that they have done for us. They have really helped us have some significant wins and I know that they're going to show up in a big way tomorrow night.

Q. Going back to 2022 when you hired Nate, you go get Sam Griesel, what was the thought process there? You started changing the way you were going to play.

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, well Nate and I have been



together a long time. I hired Nate to come in, and he was my video guy at Iowa State. I brought him to the Bulls with me. He went on to Windy City in the inaugural season with the G League team. Brought him back with Chicago. The best thing to happen to me was when Billy Donovan didn't retain him. That allowed me to get reunited with Nate. He's just so detail oriented in everything he does. The passion you see on the sidelines, that's how he is every day. He's allowed me to focus on the other side of the ball.

I completely turned the defense over to him. Certainly we meet on everything and sign off on it, but very rarely when he brings something up do I -- the 1-3-1 the other day, he said, What do you think? I said, What do you think, Nate? He said, I think we should do it. And I was reluctant because how hot Vanderbilt was. And then we went to it and it was the reason that we won the game. So Nate is just, he's one of the best in the business on that side of the ball, and just feel really fortunate to be around a guy that puts as much time and effort into it. He's had 24/7 in this thing. He's a big reason for our success.

And then Sam Griesel I talked a lot about Sam, but he really was the guy -- and Emmanuel Bandoumel doesn't get enough credit as well. When we had those guys -- and I'm sick for Emmanuel with how he got hurt that year. Juwan went down that year as well. That's really when the narrative started to turn with Nebraska basketball. Sam and Emmanuel were the guys that really get the credit. And then Derek and Juwan and Casey and then Josiah, Bryce Williams, all those guys played a part in it but it really started with Sam and Emmanuel.

Q. Folgueiras was single digits against you guys both meetings, but he's come alive a little bit in the tournament. Does that change your preparation at all?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, he's really good. Playing at a high level right now as well. Obviously confident with the shot like that can do for you and I thought he was terrific in both of Iowa's wins over Clemson and Florida. You just always have to have awareness, he does a great job not only shooting the ball but he does, he gets to the basket as well and defensively he's really good in their pick-and-roll coverage. So they make life very difficult on you. Folgueiras I think is a big part of that on the defensive end, they swarm you they're all over the place, they turn you over better than any team in the Big Ten. Folgueiras is playing with a lot of confidence right now.

Q. Is there something to refocus maybe this team with the rivalry with Iowa that's the opponent?

FRED HOIBERG: No, I don't think so. Whoever you play at this time of year whether it was Iowa or Florida you were going to have to be ready and have to be on point if you

had a chance to win. You just happen to be playing a familiar foe in the same league. Let me just say this about the Big Ten: They have six teams in the Sweet 16. That's phenomenal. And how it prepares you for this moment playing against that quality of opponent night-in and night-out. I'm just really happy for the league. It's been a fun ride, it's a grind to get through it. But it's going to be fun to see hopefully multiple teams in the Final Four.

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