

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

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Houston, Texas, USA

Toyota Center

**Nebraska Cornhuskers**

**Coach Fred Hoiberg**

**Jamarques Lawrence**

**Sam Hoiberg**

**Rienk Mast**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Iowa - 77, Nebraska - 71

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

FRED HOIBERG: Hat's off to Iowa. They played great, especially down the stretch, and they deserved the win. It stings. This one hurts about as bad as any I've been a part of, just because of what this group is all about. We don't get to lace 'em up anymore together as a group. They have been all about the right things. These guys will be a part of history of Nebraska basketball forever, for winning the first NCAA tournament game, getting to the Sweet 16, most wins in the history of the program, highest ranking. They just did so many things to elevate our program. I'm really proud 'em.

When the sting does wear off, which it will at some point, maybe, but, you know, these guys deserve a lot of credit for what they have done for Nebraska basketball. And when we come back, whenever it is, for a reunion, we'll get to hang a banner next year, a banner that's never been hung in PBA. And we'll get invited back some day. Hopefully I'm still around. But these guys, with their kids, will be able to come back and talk about this season.

We're going to win these games. We're going to continue to compete for championships. Our team was picked 14th in the league. Then we have the adversity of losing Conner and Ugi, who were absolutely two of our rotation players early in the process. The way these guys handled



adversity and fought through tough times, even though you lose huge key pieces like that and stayed together, that says everything you need to know about 'em.

These guys -- these three here next to me, in particular, getting Jamarques Lawrence back here. Jamarques Lawrence is part of probably two of the best seasons ever in Nebraska basketball. What Rienk Mast went through -- I've talked a lot about how disciplined he is. He's the most disciplined human being I've ever been around in my life, and I'm so happy that he was able to finish his career on a high note after what he went through and everything that he had to do. Never skipped a step in his rehab process. That's why he got back to the player that he is. Then going to work every day with this guy for five years.

(Pause.)

FRED HOIBERG: I'll finish it. It was awesome.

**Q. Jamarques and Sam, what did you feel like changed in the second half? What was Iowa maybe doing differently that allowed them to kind of take the momentum?**

JAMARQUES LAWRENCE: Iowa did nothing differently. We just kind of messed up on a couple things defensively.

SAM HOIBERG: They hit more shots than us at the end of the day. I thought I played very poorly offensively. Rienk didn't make any threes. So they made more shots at the end of the day. They got their game on the floor and we didn't.

**Q. Sam, your dad talked about the sting of the immediate coming off this loss. How do you kind of contextualize the pain you're feeling right now and all the success and joy that you had over the course of this season?**

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, I mean, I think once it wears off, we're going to be really proud of what we did. We wanted to get that monkey off our back for the program to get to new heights, and it sucks that we can't get it even further. Now we have to make an Elite Eight. That's what the program's never done before. So at least that narrative is gone and we can be proud about that. But, yeah, losing,

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and not playing well especially, that's what makes it sting.

**Q. Rienk, 58 seconds left, they had that deep ball to Alvaro for the bucket. I think there were four players on the court. Can you say what happened?**

FRED HOIBERG: I'll address that one. Put that one on me. It was a miscommunication and I'm the head coach. Put that one on me.

**Q. You guys were a part of one of the most successful runs in Nebraska basketball history. How rewarding is it to know that you were key cogs in leaving this program as good as it's ever been?**

RIENK MAST: That's what we work so hard for. We've put in so much work in the off-season the whole year and, yeah, to know that we've made a little part of Nebraska history is very rewarding. Hopefully that feeling comes at some point. Definitely don't feel that right now, though.

THE MODERATOR: All right. The student-athletes are excused. We'll take questions for Coach.

**Q. Can you share some thoughts on -- Coach McCollum came up here and spoke very highly of the rivalry. I think he spoke very highly of you as well. Can you share some thoughts on just the success that he's had this year, and then just Bennett as well. They have been kind of linked together and won everywhere they have been.**

FRED HOIBERG: I've got so much respect for Ben with how he has run his programs, and obviously, it doesn't matter the level, he's going to continue to be successful wherever he is, and he's proven that. He's proven that at the D-II level, he proved it at a mid major, and now he's proving it in the Big Ten at a high-major level.

So he runs a system that fits who they are. They do a great job of staying in their roles. I think we're pretty similar in that regard. We had great role acceptance this year. That's why we were still playing in this game.

Bennett Stirtz, I said this after we beat 'em at home in the last game, he just -- he plays with so much poise and confidence and he never gets sped up on the offensive end. The thing I look at and the difference of this thing is -- I think it was 20-7 in points off turnovers. They just took care of the ball way better than we did tonight, and they made the shots. They made 'em in the last five minutes. I thought we had some really good looks, unfortunately they didn't go down. They made 'em, and that happens some nights. Unfortunately, tonight on the biggest stage it happened. But tip your hat to Iowa, they played a great

basketball game.

**Q. The start of the game you guys seemed to have a really good plan that got you out to that big lead. In the second half what kind of adjustments did you want to make given the fact that Iowa was still able to stay within three at the break despite how well that game started?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, that was a huge key coming into this one, and that was getting off to a fast start. And we did it and got up 10 before the first media. We really kept the pressure. Offensively, we were clicking, we were humming on that end of the floor, had it going from everywhere. Ball was moving. And the one thing was turnovers. I think we had six turnovers in the first half that kept them in it. They made a big shot at halftime to pull it within one possession.

Then we kept it. I think we still had a lead with five minutes left. Again, we just, I thought we missed some good looks. I'll go back and watch it at some point and see what we could have done better, but they made seemed like they made all the open shots at the end, we didn't. Again, that happens in this game. Unfortunately, that was the result tonight.

**Q. Just going back to the four men on the court on that final inbound. There's some confusion online about if that's the rules, you're supposed to have five guys on the court. Were the officials supposed to hold the ball before the ball was put in play?**

FRED HOIBERG: That's a good question, and I've never been in a situation like that. I know they always count to make sure there's not six. I don't know the rule on that with four. But, yeah, I mean, again, it was a miscommunication, and unfortunately it happened. But as far as the rule I've never been a part of anything like that, so...

**Q. We talked a lot about that, a couple years ago, that team and group laying the foundation for what this group has been able to do. What about this group laying the foundation for the future?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, a hundred percent. They have shown what is possible with Nebraska basketball when you get the right people in your program. Again, I credit not just the three guys that were up here I talked about Kendall Blue. I talked about how professional he has been, even though he's not, he didn't play the role that he envisioned when we brought him on board, but he's been a great leader for us. Jared, I talked to him, he was part of one of the biggest wins in program's history, that win at Illinois with what he did. Had some big moments for us as well. So they did, those seniors especially, I'm so thankful for

them. These three guys have been here longer, obviously, and for more of it. And they have seen, Sam especially, when it was in its depths and what it became. We have to expect to be here. Now that we've done it, this can't be one every eight years, it's got to be something where we're competing in this tournament, and as you see, anything can happen. You can compete for championships if you get hot at the right time. Again, I'm so proud of these guys for everything that they accomplished for Nebraska basketball, and I know Husker Nation as well, as much as this one stings, when we hang that banner next year it's going to be a hell of a celebration.

**Q. Couple years ago there were people talking about your job and your future, and here you are first time ever winning a tournament game, first team to get to the Sweet 16. How did you sort of withstand all of that to be able to reach this point with your team?**

FRED HOIBERG: I don't listen to any of that stuff you write. So it's just -- listen, you keep believing in yourself. I never lost, I never stopped believing that I was the right guy for this job, that we put the right staff together. When we flipped it four years ago, this is the best four-year stretch in the history of the program. Three, the first time, three, 20-win seasons in a row. And I'm just I'm really proud of it because of what it means for my family, more importantly what it means for Husker Nation. They love this stuff, man. You saw 'em again tonight. I thought we had, you know, a lot of fans, after what we did in Oklahoma City, taking it over. And it's what it's all about. You want to compete, you want to make 'em proud, and I think we put together a group of guys, whether you won or lost, this fan base is absolutely 100 percent admiration for these guys because they laid it on the line every time. We were undermanned. I think the sum was greater than the parts, that's probably never more indicative of a team than this group right here. We weren't the most talented, you could see we weren't the most athletic, but we just found a way to go out there and compete. We fit, we fit. And these guys played the right way, they were unselfish, they were first to the floor, they were connected. They just did so many things that I think a fan base can rally behind.

So, yeah, I guess to answer your question, it's just continuing to believe, get the right people in here that your fans will be proud of, and this team absolutely epitomized that.

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