

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Men's Head Coach

Fred Hoiberg



KEVIN WARREN: Our next head coach to the podium is Fred Hoiberg. He's the head basketball coach from the University of Nebraska. Fred and his wife have done so much in the community, not only here in the Twin Cities but also for the state of Nebraska, with Coaches Versus Cancer and the American Heart Association.

Fred is not only an outstanding person, he's an outstanding coach. I've been fortunate to know him for nearly probably 20 years since our kids grew up playing Pop Warner football together here in the Twin Cities.

Welcome back, Fred. I'd like to welcome the head basketball coach at the University of Nebraska, Fred Hoiberg.

FRED HOIBERG: Thank you, Kevin.

First of all, just want to say how great it is to be back in Minneapolis. Some of my greatest basketball memories are in this building. One that sticks out to me most is Game 7 against the Sacramento Kings in the Western Conference semifinals when Kevin Garnett and myself combined for 32 points and 27 rebounds. Kevin at 32-21, I contributed with six rebounds in that game (laughter).

One of the greatest memories and greatest events I think in Minnesota Timberwolves basketball history. To be part of that, to see Kevin jump on the scores table at halfcourt, single best performance I've ever been a part of, to see what KG did that night.

It's awesome to be back here in the Twin Cities where I have some of my greatest memories as a basketball player and also started my career as a front office executive with the Minnesota Timberwolves.

I'm really excited about our group. I have a team that's got great toughness and length. I can say that's the first time we've had a group with positional size across the board, which is so important in this league.

The two guys that have really set the tone for our team are

here in the building representing our program today in Derrick Walker and Sam Griesel. Two guys that had the opportunities to start their professional careers and decided to come back because they wanted to be a part of something at Nebraska basketball that had never been done before.

Those two every day are setting the tone for our team as well as guys like Emmanuel Bandoumel, who we got as a two-time back-to-back double-digit scorer the last two seasons at SMU. One of the greatest leaders that I've ever had. That goes back to my really good teams at Iowa State with Monté Morris, Naz Long, Matt Thomas, guys like that. I would put him up with any of those guys as far as being a great culture person for our program, and a guy that, with Sam and Derrick, is setting the tone for our team.

Every day these guys step on the floor, they compete. I do know that this is a team that our fan base will be able to rally behind just because of the makeup and the character of this group.

Excited about our team. With that, I'll answer any questions.

Q. I know you at Iowa State were one of the first coaches to lean hard into recruiting transfers. Now with really everyone doing that, how much that process has changed versus when you first started doing it?

FRED HOIBERG: That's a great question.

It changed a lot obviously with the makeup of college basketball right now and the landscape of our sport with the transfer portal.

I look back at our first year, we took over a program that had I think it was four scholarship players when we took over. I talked to our staff about finding a way as quickly as possible to get a group that can compete against the top teams in our league, Kansas, Texas, those types of schools.

We found that in the transfer market. I didn't say we're



going to go out and take only transfers, but that's how we were going to at least be able to compete in the quickest way possible. We got that with Royce White from Minnesota, we got it with Chris Babb from Penn State, Chris Allen from Michigan State and Anthony Booker from Southern Illinois.

That was back in the old days where you had to sit out for a season. I could see the chemistry those guys built, how quickly I thought that we'd be able to turn it around just because of the talent of specifically those four players.

We were able to, after that, once we got on the map, to get in front of some pretty high-level high school players. That's where when they saw our style of play, the spread, five-out system that we were running, attracted Georges Niang. We won a Big 12 tournament championship, and that attracted more.

I think we had a good mix of transfers, four-year guys, and the four-year guys were the staples of our program.

It came down to us with Royce, us and Kentucky. The proximity to home in the Twin Cities is really what got us over the hump, getting that key recruit, key player as I ever had at Iowa State.

Now you're competing against everybody for transfers. Not just three schools, now everybody, Blue Bloods, are bringing in transfers to help supplement their rosters.

You see the older teams. That's one of the reasons I'm excited about our team this year. We're old. We got really good players that have played in some high-level programs.

We have players for the first time that have played in the post-season. Sam Griesel played in the NCAA tournament. Juwan Gary from Alabama won an SEC championship and was on a Sweet 16 team at Alabama.

Emmanuel Bandoumel played in two post-seasons. Derrick Walker was the only guy on our team last year when he was at Tennessee that played in the post-season.

I guess long-winded way to answer your question. But right now I guess the biggest difference is we're competing against so many more schools as far as transfers. But when I took over at Iowa State, that was the quickest way to build our program up.

Q. This time last year you had palpable buzz surrounding the program. What did you learn about managing expectations last year?

FRED HOIBERG: You look at last year's team, we were 4-10 in two possession games in the last five minutes when we had a game within two possessions. That's obviously not good enough. You find a way to win some of those close games early...

We lost some heartbreakers, missed free throws, missed blockouts, some things that could have gotten us over the hump.

If you're confident, you find a way to win those close ones. By losing our close games early, that had us on the wrong side. Once we got it going at the end of the year, that's what I envisioned that team, was hoping that team to come together.

Obviously losing Trey, the toughest perimeter player we had, in the third game of the season with a broken foot. Losing Wilhelm, one of our tougher front line players, didn't help.

At the end of the year when we got it going, it was a very together group. It took us too long to get there.

Our biggest message to this team is really focusing on and going out and doing the little things, finding a way to get over the hump on those games early in the season to build confidence to where you find a way to win those games.

I've been on teams -- I give you the example of the Timberwolves team that I referenced earlier. If we were within five or six points in the last three minutes of the game, we knew we were going to win. That's what confidence does for you.

My teams at Iowa State, we won every close game. We had been in so many of those situations, we found a way to go over the hump. That's what we have to find a way to do. You're in so many close grind-out battles, especially in this league, you got to find a way to get those close ones. If you can do that, that's what builds character, toughness, confidence, so you can be competing for a post-season spot at the end of the year.

Q. Sam Griesel grew up a Husker fan. What kind of impact have you seen from having a guy like that in the program with the team and in terms of fan buzz?

FRED HOIBERG: It's incredible. I'll just go back to when Sam came on his official visit and sat in my office, was in there with his mom and dad, a couple of our assistant coaches. All he talked about was winning.

It was very refreshing. A lot of times when you're sitting in those meetings, the questions are: How many shots am I



going to get? How many minutes am I going to play?
What role do you anticipate for me?

All Sam cared about was he wanted to get this program to where it's never been because he was a passionate Nebraska basketball fan growing up.

The chemistry that Sam and the others have built by spending time with each other off the floor, which again is very important when you're playing in close games, to have a trust level. These guys genuinely care for each other. Sam has been a big part of that, those other guys that I talked about with Derrick, Emmanuel, Wilhelm. We got a group of guys that will go to battle with each other every night.

Sam's passion for the program is rubbing off on our other players because he's been there, seen it, he grew up in it, and he wants to see this thing be successful.

I feel great where we are. It means nothing right now. We got to go out and prove it. I think we have a group of players that our fan base can be proud of.

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