

# Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

## Nebraska Cornhuskers

Men's Head Coach

## Fred Hoiberg



**THE MODERATOR:** Up next from the University of Nebraska is Head Coach Fred Hoiberg. Coach Hoiberg is entering his fifth season in Lincoln with the Huskers.

Coach, we'll begin with your opening statement.

**FRED HOIBERG:** Always great to be back in Minneapolis. Certainly one of my favorite places that I've been on my journey with the great success we had here on some really fun teams. Great to hear Prince on the sound system there. He always came into our playoff games with his platform shoes on and his entourage in the second quarter and made a big scene. So pretty cool to hear that.

It's always great to be back in Minneapolis. Just, first of all, I'll talk about our group this year. Really enjoyable group to coach, top to bottom. It's a team that comes to compete every day. We had a really unique opportunity this summer with a lot of new faces, to go to Spain and have a very good trip. With a foreign trip you can do once every four years. Just really excited about our group.

It makes our job a lot easier as coaches when you have a team that comes prepared to work every day and competes every time they step on the floor.

One thing I'm really excited about with this team is we've got nine players that have four years of experience or more. We are the oldest team in the Big Ten. We've got a lot of guys that are battle-tested in really good leagues and have over 50% of our scoring back from last year's group, which finished with the best record in the league the last month of the season. Finished 5-1, and the one loss to Michigan State was probably the best 30 minutes that we played the entire year and the run that they went on to finish that game is something I don't think I've ever seen before and hope I don't ever see again.

I have a group that's really enjoyable to coach. The momentum we finished last year's season with I think gave us the opportunity to get some really impactful transfers in the portal.

The thing that we have this year maybe more than any other team that I've ever coached at this level is a physicality and a toughness to us. With getting Juwan Gary back healthy after losing him midway through the season last year in January to a shoulder injury. He's a guy that can defend all five positions. With the left shoulder he really worked on his shooting, did a lot of form work to really try to help with the balance issue that he had on his shot. He shot the ball extremely well so far in our training camp.

Getting Josiah Allick back for his last year. I think he saw the success that Sam Griesel had the previous season in coming back to Lincoln for his last year, so we're very fortunate to get Josiah, another guy that is just a tenacious player. Goes after every ball. A tremendous rebounder. He was second in his league last year in rebounding and a guy that really, again, has worked on his shot that I think can stretch the floor for us in our spread offense.

Rienk Mast is another one that also was second in his league in rebounding and brings a physicality and a toughness to him and a guy that goes out and works every single day. In fact, you have to almost slow them down and tell him to take a little time off because of his work ethic.

Then Brice Williams as well from Charlotte. A 6'8" combo forward that can handle the ball. I think he's going to be able to bring the ball. We've been using him a little bit at the point spot. That's one of the questions I think on our team. He has handled that very well to this point.

He is a guy that can really score at all three levels. Very good rebounder, and he can really heat up and get it going.

So excited about the newcomers as well as the guys coming back. Keisei Tominaga was as a big move for our team and getting him back in the mix after the success he had, especially in the second half of the season last year after the injuries to Juwan Gary and Emmanuel Bandoumel. He is such a unique player that plays the game with a tremendous joy every time he's on the floor.

Guys follow him. Even though his English has gotten a lot



better, but the way that he plays is something that the guys can follow and take from his lead. So it was great to get Keisei back in the mix.

Also, some of the other players returning, C.J. Wilcher is having a great preseason for us so far. He's in the best shape I think he's been in certainly since we've had him.

Sam Hoiberg, who had a tremendous last half the season, another guy that took advantage of injuries from last season's team. It's another guy that I think developed a confidence that will help him going in now to his second year of eligibility.

Like I said, Juwan Gary coming back from injury last year, and Jamarques Lawrence is a guy that is really shifting positions for us and playing pretty much exclusively at the point for us right now. It's a shift in mentality.

I have to continue to remind him to be aggressive. What's made him a special player over the course of his career is his ability to put the ball in the basket, but now the balance of running an offense and running the show and getting players involved is something that he is still learning. It probably will continue to learn as we play the first couple of games of the season.

I've been really pleased with Jamarques going out there and running the show for us.

As far as newcomers Matar Diop is a guy that we got late in the process. 6'10" with a 7'3" wing span. An incredible athlete that has a ton of upside and has a chance to get on the floor and play meaningful minutes as a true freshman.

And Eli Rice. He is a 6'8" forward that we got as a freshman from IMG Academy. Led our team in scoring on our foreign trip this year to Spain.

Really good group. Again, fun team to coach and excited about this group.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor now for questions for Coach Hoiberg.

**Q. You talk about all your guys individually, but how have you seen the new pieces blend with the old ones in the first few weeks of practice?**

FRED HOIBERG: It's a very mature group, and it's a team that -- I think last year's group really set the culture that we needed and really flipped it with Griesel, with Bandomel, with Derrick Walker, all being older players. We have a very mature group of guys.

I can't tell you exactly who the one leader of this team is, but it's a team that certainly is led by committee. It's been a committee-led team. As far as blending them together, I mean, it's what our sport is right now is with the portal, with bringing in as many new faces as we do, but again, when you look at the amount of games that our players have played and started, we've got a lot of guys that have started at a high level. You bring those guys together with the players that they're in integrated with, because you have a culture set, those guys have come in and really kind of taken it to the next level.

I think this is, again, a mature group that I've ever had, certainly at Nebraska even going back to my days at Iowa State. It's a team that I think will battle against adversity, similar to last year's team. When you have two starters in the middle of the season that go out, you have to have a good culture to fight through that adversity. I think this team is built the same way.

**Q. It's probably the deepest roster you've had since you've been here. Guys that have started a lot of games, played a lot of minutes in their career. What is the challenge of establishing role definition and getting guys to accept the fact that they might not start or they might not play extensive minutes and still buy into what you're doing?**

FRED HOIBERG: That is going to be a challenge, but it's a good challenge for us and a good problem to have, when you have great depth.

Our big thing right now is figuring out the rotation. We had our first intrasquad scrimmage of fall camp and we're going to have another one on Thursday. That's where you figure out who is going to be in your rotation.

Early on the rotation may not be the same as it is as you go throughout the year. How certain players respond to pressure, situations on the court. But I'm really mixing the teams pretty much on a daily basis to see who fits with each other. The one thing that I think you'll see with this team with the depth is we're going to have a lot of different combinations we can put on the floor. We can play smaller, more skilled line-ups, but we can also play big, and I think have a chance of being a team that can punish some people, especially on the glass, which we have not had that at my time at Nebraska.

If you throw a line-up with Brice Williams, Juwan Gary, Josiah Allick and Rienk Mast, that all have a level of physicality to all of those players. That's the challenge right now is figuring out not only who starts, which I really could care less about, but more importantly, who is going to finish the game for us.

Again, I keep throwing the word "mature" out, but it is a mature group, and we talk a lot about role acceptance. Whatever role you have, you have to shine and star in that role. I'm confident our guys will do that.

**Q. You've talked a bit about the experience this team has. What goes into that philosophy of going after guys in the offseason, like Rienk and Josiah who have a lot of college basketball experience?**

FRED HOIBERG: Well, I talked a lot to our staff about the types of players that we want, the types of players that the Nebraska fan base can get behind. I talked a lot early in the process last year of that team was going to be a very enjoyable team to watch.

Had we stayed healthy, I honestly think we had a chance to be a Tournament team last year. We had Derrick Walker out for the first five, and then had a really good stretch when we had our starters together. After the injuries, went through a tough stretch and then finished the year out really strong, but it was a team I think every time we stepped on the floor, our fan base could rally behind because of how hard they played. Diving after balls, taking charges, really had a defensive identity early in the season with the group that went out there and played with a great toughness to them.

So when you talk to your staff about identifying those types of players, I think I give our staff a lot of credit for going out there and finding the right guys that are going to continue on with making the fan base very proud. So now it's about taking the next step.

I know it's an important year. It's getting into the postseason and having a chance to compete for championships. That's what this thing is all about.

This group I think is a team that whatever happens on the floor, they're going to continue to fight and continue to battle, and that's all you can ask of your team.

So I'm excited about this group. I'm excited about this year, and again, it's a team that I think our fans will really enjoy watching.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Hoiberg, thank you for your time.

FRED HOIBERG: Thank you.

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