

# NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Minnesota State vs. Minnesota

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Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

## Minnesota State Mavericks

## Mike Hastings

## Wyatt Aamodt

## Nathan Smith

### Semifinal Media Conference



MIKE HASTINGS: Boy, I can barely pluck a banjo, let alone carry a tune.

THE MODERATOR: Smitty?

NATHAN SMITH: I'm going to pass. I was pretty bad in the green screen. Maybe Wyatt can.

WYATT AAMODT: No. I'll save all your ears (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Mike, you've had a week or so to look at Minnesota, study tape. What do you anticipate? Given your preference, you want a track meet or another lock it down, 1-0 kind of game?**

MIKE HASTINGS: Well, what I'm expecting is two teams that are going to go out and try and get to their own game as quick as they can.

For us, we've got to go out and try to make sure, with the team with the amount of draft picks that they have, the talent they have, we don't want to create their offense for them. Puck management is going to be very important to us.

Each game kind of takes on its own identity. We're going to try to get out and get to our game as quick as possible. Try to make sure we keep them off the power-play as much as we can while we're chasing our game.

THE MODERATOR: If you didn't see the news, Spencer Penrose trophy winner for the second straight year as the National Coach of the Year, Mike Hastings.

MIKE HASTINGS: Thanks.

**Q. Mike, your team has beaten Minnesota three in a row, six of seven. What has been the common thread in those games?**

MIKE HASTINGS: Your memory is better than mine. I can just think back to last year.

THE MODERATOR: We're pleased to be joined by the Minnesota State Mavericks. Coach, maybe you can get us started. Obviously you're the only team back in the Frozen Four this year. Come in with the most wins. Talk about the season, the arrival in Boston.

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, thanks. It's great to be in Boston. We talked about trying to get us to a point during this season to have the opportunity that we have in front of us on Thursday a year ago. The last Frozen Four didn't end the way we wanted it to. We've been on a journey ever since to try and get back here. So now we want to try and take advantage of the opportunity that these guys have earned to be able to play.

We're excited about being in Boston. The trip's been seamless. The people have been fantastic. Hotel, setup, all the hosts, and the people that are helping us get comfortable have done a phenomenal job. Our entire group's really excited about what's in front of us on Thursday.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, could you recreate some of the green screen, do a little bit of song or air guitar. What can you do for us?

WYATT AAMODT: Coach is a man of many talents, so I'll follow his lead on this one (laughter).

MIKE HASTINGS: Thank God they didn't ask me to do any of that in the green room. I'm going to strike out on that one.

THE MODERATOR: You don't do any Taylor Swift?



We got off to a good start. Any time that you get to these spots, I've been on the good side and the bad side, as I said earlier, these games take on their own personality. Can you stick with it whether you're in a peak or a valley? Can you maintain it or get out of it as quick as possible, or stay as long as possible when you're playing well?

For us, we've gotten off to good starts. I know there isn't a coach in this tournament that isn't going to talk to their team about having a good start so you're not playing from behind.

Going back to what I addressed, it's getting to our game, trying to play on our toes as much as we can and possess the puck. We're a better team when we have it than when we don't.

I think our starts have probably been the biggest positive that I've seen when we've played in games like this that we've had some success.

**Q. Wyatt, Nathan, how was practice today, getting the feet moving, taking in everything? Looked like a surreal experience to me.**

WYATT AAMODT: Yeah, I thought it was good. Obviously it's kind of nice to get here two days early, take it all in, enjoy the moment. A lot of us worked hard for this, to get here. All the teams. So I think just to enjoy the moment, counting today. Get our feet wet, got our work in, it was good. I thought we had a good skate. Guys were good, we had a lot of energy. I think between just enjoying it, getting our work done, we're going in the right direction heading into tomorrow.

NATHAN SMITH: Kind of going off that a little bit, it's nice to be here in Boston again, two Frozen Fours in a row. Tough out last year. The boys are pretty excited to be back, hopefully make another run at it.

**Q. For the players, kind of comparing last year, the monumental accomplishment, you got to the Frozen Four, but can you compare what that was like to what you expect the energy is going to be like with all the differences with the crowd?**

NATHAN SMITH: I mean, obviously last year was a COVID year. The building, I mean, there was a decent amount of fans, but it's not going to be like what we're expecting this year. Hopefully the place is pretty loud, and we'll try to use that energy to our advantage.

WYATT AAMODT: Yeah, I agree. Like Smitty said, last year with the COVID stuff, I thought our fans traveled well,

there were some people in the building. Not going to be anything like we're expecting tomorrow.

Like Smitty said, I think we've just got to use that energy to our advantage, keep building off each other. I think our team has done a great job of that so far this year, taking it in blocks of five, not viewing it as a whole period. Between building off our own energy, I think using the fans here is going to do us justice as well.

THE MODERATOR: Any connections to Boston?

WYATT AAMODT: I've never been here.

NATHAN SMITH: I've been here once, but nothing to do with hockey, just a vacation.

MIKE HASTINGS: Shout-out to Johnny McInnis, former captain of ours, who decided to come to Minnesota and play hockey instead of staying out in Boston. Look forward to hopefully running into him and a couple other alumni while we're here.

**Q. This week, tomorrow, you have the late game. Last weekend in Albany you had the early game, last year you had the early game in Pittsburgh. How does that affect the preparations? Plus, negative?**

WYATT AAMODT: Like I said, I think our game times have been all over the map. Last weekend in Albany, with that noon game, which is a little bit different. That awkward time from when you get up, are you going to nap, go for a walk. I think our team has done a good job of adjusting to that, just sticking to our business.

Having that late game tomorrow will give us a little bit more time. Obviously we'll come here, get our stuff done. Other than that it's just going to be on ourselves to treat it like a normal game day. At the end of the day we all know what's at hand.

I think we've done a good job of that so far this season. I think we've got to do that as well. Just be mature about the situation, know there's a big task coming up at 8:00, 8:30, whatever it is.

MIKE HASTINGS: I'm going to give credit to these two young men as well as our leadership group. It comes in different boxes, adversity or however you want to look at a challenge like that.

To us, it's an opportunity. That group's done a really good job at whatever has come their way, just taking it and making the best of it. It's going to be the same thing tomorrow night. Minnesota is playing in a late game. They

probably played a few games in the Big Ten at that time. We've played some late games.

Really, it's just the adaptability of your group, then the leadership group being able to sell it in a manner the guys can buy.

**Q. You mentioned creating your game, chasing your game, not chasing Minnesota. How important is the communication on defense knowing you're facing a prolific offense?**

MIKE HASTINGS: For us, I think that is incredibly important for us because I think going all the way from their back end, whether you're talking LaCombe, Faber, Johnson, then I can go right down their lineup, when you talk about Meyers, you talk about Knies, Huglen, a young guy that stepped up to that unit, they beat teams with depth, they've beat teams with their defensemen. Close has come in and done a phenomenal job at batting close to .930 as far as a save percentage.

For us, we don't want to pour any gas on the fire. Puck management and us trying to utilize some of the same things I just said about Minnesota for ourselves. We've utilized our depth, our back end has been good, and our goaltending has been good.

I think you add all that up, it's a pretty good matchup.

**Q. Mike, having to travel to Albany, coming back out east to Boston, what are your thoughts on the way regionals have been working, if you've given any thought to home site regionals being an option for the future?**

MIKE HASTINGS: I think it's a topic that's going to have some momentum. When you go back, you look at Loveland, the amount of people that were there compared to Albany. We talk about it year in and year out inside our league. Don has addressed it. We have it on our agenda before we meet as an overall body down in Florida.

We're always trying to grow our game, make the environment something special for these student-athletes. Without tipping the scales that you take away what I think is beautiful about college hockey, and that's anybody can win on a given night. So you don't want to just go ahead and say we're going to dismiss it and allow these teams to host an event.

There's a lot that goes into it, but I do think now, coming out of the COVID era, seeing what we've seen just over the last four or five years, the environment for these young men to be able to be a part of like we're going to be tonight

and then talking about the regionals.

I can only speak on a lot of the ones out west, you look at Fargo, Sioux Falls, those environments start to mirror what these guys went through in their last two home games in our own building. That's something these guys -- it makes it special. Anything that we can do to keep progressing that, I think we have to have discussions about it with making sure we're not tipping the scales towards one side or another.

**Q. Mike, you got the third Spencer Penrose award of your career. Special company you're in. Talk about getting that honor.**

MIKE HASTINGS: First of all, I'm very appreciative based upon one thing, it's your peer group that votes on that. Very appreciative of that.

At the end of the day, we've talked about this multiple times, and coaches go nowhere without their players. Very blessed to have Todd Knott as my associate head coach, Paul Kirtland, the people around me, and especially the players. A coach gets recognized for how his team does. Without the team, that doesn't happen.

**Q. Last year was a good news/bad news in that the first time for your program you get to a Frozen Four, but the COVID thing, invite-only event. What is the level of excitement this year? Are you hearing from more people making the trip? Is there almost becoming an expectation that every April we're going to be someplace special?**

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I mean, I think that's what we play for every year. We're trying to get to the Frozen Four every year, win a national championship.

Last year, like you said, the COVID year, I was thankful enough to have quite a few family members be able to come out. I'm pretty grateful that they did. The same people are actually going to come this year, too, plus a few friends.

I'm looking forward to that.

WYATT AAMODT: Yeah, I agree. We had some friends and family in attendance last year. I think everybody has some more people coming out. There's kind of a buzz around our city of Mankato. Predictable to see. If it's almost become normal, I don't think that will ever be a case for us. Coaches, we've talked about this before, this is special, so don't ever miss this opportunity, this chance. That's kind of been our conversations. This type of stuff doesn't happen often.

Obviously proud of our program for making it here two years in a row, but at the end of the day we haven't gotten done what we want to get done.

THE MODERATOR: Who have you heard from?

MIKE HASTINGS: People looking for tickets (laughter). But at the end of the day, hopefully everybody in here, even this, it's just refreshing. Special time to see how the regionals played out. One-goal games, overtime games, the excitement, a little bit of controversy over a goal being scored with the clock. Hopefully, as Don would state, those are all in our past.

At the end of the day this is just an incredible time. We're at a place that's storied in Boston, rich in hockey tradition. Now everybody gets to experience it. Hopefully we've turned that page to a book we're never going to go back and read again.

We're excited about it. You have friends, family, fans, alumni. I'm talking all four programs. Just an exciting time for our game.

**Q. You beat Minnesota in the tournament last year. You talk about the buzz around Mankato. What is the culture of Mankato in comparison to the state?**

WYATT AAMODT: Yeah, I think that's a good question. Just growing up as a Minnesota kid, obviously watching all the Division I programs in our state was pretty cool to see. Just get to play them, kind of the big dog to Minnesota college teams as some people would say, on the national stage would be pretty cool.

I think we've got to do our best, like coach said, hop on them early, enjoy the experience, but know we have a job at hand. We'll just take it five minutes at a time and just play our game.

THE MODERATOR: You settling into the state of hockey thing from Florida?

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, the weather for sure (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: What is it like on campus?

NATHAN SMITH: As far as?

THE MODERATOR: The buzz.

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, we have a lot of support back home in the community. Mankato is kind of a smaller town if you're comparing it to Minnesota. We're grateful that we

have the support that we do with all the fans, all the sponsors and everything.

We're hoping that they all come out this weekend and support us here, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: You're from Minnesota. How do you talk about Dan's question, what it's like?

MIKE HASTINGS: We're all trying to grow the game, you know. For me, I played junior hockey a hundred years ago back in the USHL, down in Rochester. At the time it was basketball country. It wasn't the hockey hotbed that it's been.

We hosted Hockey Day in Minnesota, had over 10,000 people inside and outside of a football stadium on our campus. I think that says a lot, one, for the leadership of our community to be able to pull that off, but more importantly, the support from the grass-roots level.

The amount of players that were able to get on that ice sheet in that time said a lot about the southern part of the state right now.

I think the Minnesota Wild, going back historically, University of Minnesota, what Scott Sandelin has done at the University of Minnesota Duluth, Tom Serratore, St. Thomas right now, Brett Thomas at St. Cloud.

When I first played for Herbie, he talked about trying to match what Michigan had as far as Division I programs within their borders. Here we are today.

I think it's an exciting time in the southern part of our state. We're proud to be from MSU and represent them the best we can.

**Q. Mike, in writing a story about the '74 Gophers team that came here and won, I interviewed John Perpich. He said he was in a bit of a quandary because he coached both you and Bob. He didn't know how he was going to reach out to the two of you. Did you hear from Coach Perpich?**

MIKE HASTINGS: Must have called Bobby (laughter). I can maybe answer that for you. Maybe he didn't get the number, but my phone didn't ring (laughter).

Perp has been good for me from day one when I had the opportunity to be around St. Clout State as a student and a player and well after that.

It's special. We're proud of what goes on within the state. We're excited about the opportunity that we have that

these guys have earned.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thanks very much.

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