

# NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Michigan vs Quinnipiac

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Amalie Arena

## Quinnipiac Bobcats Coach Rand Pecknold

### Semifinal Media Conference



COACH PECKNOLD: That's a great question. My daughter last night, my 16-year-old daughter, was very worried that they'd know our plays and that we'd have to have some new things up our sleeves. So in the end you've still got to play the game.

I think they do know a little bit how we want to play. But Michigan, their coaches are going to figure it out in the end. You've got to make plays, stay out of the penalty box and you've got to get goaltending. Those to me are the biggest things.

**Q. I know this is your third trip to the Frozen Four. What kind of has stood out with this team that's gotten you to the Frozen Four? And not only that, but what stood out with this team in comparison to the teams that maybe couldn't get over the hump to get into the Frozen Four?**

COACH PECKNOLD: This was I think our third Elite Eight in the last five years. I think just a little bit is matchups. I thought we were in a tough bracket. But like last year, you know, was even harder. Michigan was the No. 1 team in the country at that point. They had that juggernaut with all that talent.

And then the previous time, I think it was Duluth who ended up winning. They were great.

It's just hard to get to the Frozen Four. There's not a lot of teams that have done that. In the last 11 years, I think we've gone three times. We're only the sixth team that has done that.

It's not easy to get there. It's not easy to get back. It's really hard. You have to have a lot of things go your way. You have to have the goaltending and score some timely goals.

To me, this group compared to my other two Frozen Four teams, there's more similarities than differences. And I think it's really about our culture, just a great group of guys that are willing to be selfless and willing to buy into what we need to do to be successful against teams that are probably going to have more talent than us.

**Q. This is a familiar spot for you?**

COACH PECKNOLD: It is. Excited to go back. We're really proud of our group and how we battled through. I thought we had a really tough bracket with Merrimac, Harvard and Ohio State. Really good teams. I was proud of our effort.

I thought the commitment was excellent. Obviously Yaniv played great both games. And we're excited to go back to Tampa, go to the Frozen Four. And love the challenge of playing Michigan.

**Q. Yes it's all about matchups and whatnot, but when you look at a guy like Luke Hughes, what stands out about a guy like him when you're looking at him on film? And what makes him different than the average college defenseman?**

COACH PECKNOLD: He's an elite player. Honestly, he probably doesn't need to be in college this year. He could already be in the NHL. I'm glad he did play because he was my captain for the World Juniors.

And I always say about Luke, as good as a player he is I think he's a better person. A phenomenal athlete, phenomenal person. He's got that elusiveness that you can't teach. You can't teach what he does.

So we're going to have to defend him in waves and know he's going to make plays and stuff. And I think the big thing with high-end kids at Michigan, we have to make them defend and make them spend time in the D zone.

**Q. I'm sure you're well aware, 20 percent of the U.S. roster you coached at World Juniors, will look to get the best of you in a few days, the five Michigan players. My question is, who benefits more from that, coach or players?**

**Q. You have support from all different corners of the country, but just wondering for you personally what it means to you to have the support of your hometown, Bedford, New Hampshire?**

COACH PECKNOLD: I'm actually trying to get up to Tilton, New Hampshire to see my mom before we get going with all this.

I love it. I'm obviously from Bedford, went to Manchester West. Excited to have anyone on board with Bobcat Nation. But certainly we've got a lot of fans in the New Hampshire area.

**Q. Question about Michigan, you mentioned the loss last year, a lot of new players and new coaches. Do you use any film or any lessons you learned from last year's loss when you're preparing for this or is it a nonfactor?**

COACH PECKNOLD: No, there's a lot of things we did well last year against Michigan. We actually played pretty well at times in that game. We got a little slow start and probably need to defend a little better. They had made some high-end plays.

But there's definitely things from last year things. Naurato is a new coach but he was an assistant on last year's staff.

I don't think they've changed a tone with this team. In the end, what they're best at is high-end players. Fantilli replaces the other guys that left for the NHL. He's maybe the best player in college hockey. Luke Hughes, if Fantilli isn't, Luke Hughes probably is. So we have to defend in waves and like I said, we've got to make them play defense.

**Q. Just on Collin Graf, tremendous season but maybe not the most heralded guys coming out of the Junior Bruins and NCDL and solid freshman year at Union. But in your eyes, what's helped him in this breakout year to help set himself apart?**

COACH PECKNOLD: That's a great question. He's definitely popped this year. I think a couple things happened. One of the things, when he committed to us, I wanted to make sure he came in and came over the summer and spent some time with his teammates and got acclimated in our weight program and our culture.

He's worked on his skating. It's improved. I think the biggest thing Collin has done this year, he has really worked on the defensive side of the game, he's become a much better defensive hockey player. And when you do

that and you hunt pucks better you get to play more offense. And he's got a lot of confidence right now. He's obviously one of the best players in the country, and we feel really fortunate to have him.

**Q. Talk about Yaniv Perets. What makes him so successful? Obviously he might be a little underrated because doesn't he doesn't see many shots. What makes him successful? Is it his positioning? It looks like it's flawless.**

COACH PECKNOLD: I don't understand why he's underrated. You look at -- his record is ridiculous over the last two years -- save percentage, shutouts, wins. I don't know why people would underrate him.

He's just outstanding. He's committed to his craft. He works on it every day. He was doing something last week with -- I can't even explain it probably. I don't even know what he was doing out there with some contraption trying to get his arm set a little bit better.

But he's just so committed. He's worked on his puck handling, he tracks the puck well, he battles, he competes. And he has just elite goalie IQ. I think that's what he does best; he really reads the play well and understands where the scoring chances are going to come from, where's the 1-T threat, where's the tip-in threat. Controls his rebounds. He's just a well-rounded goalie and a highly competitive, elite athlete.

**Q. See if you could describe Michigan's top line of Fantilli, Brindley and McGroarty and what makes them tough to defend?**

COACH PECKNOLD: High-end NHL talent. They're not just going to be NHL players, they're going to be high-end NHL players. They make plays at pace. They can all skate and they think the game so well, and just a lot of times they make something out of nothing.

And, again, as I said earlier, we've got to defend them in layers and make sure that we're aware -- we are going to get guys that are going to get beat one-on-one from time to time and we have to have a second layer there and sometimes a third layer there.

I think it's important for us, which is how we always play -- we got to play Harvard and other teams, we played North Dakota this year. We played other good players, Riese Gaber and players like that. You have to defend those guys with more than one player. I think that's what we'll have to do against that Michigan top line.

**Q. What do you remember about Tampa the last time?**

COACH PECKNOLD: It was great. It was a great experience. Obviously we came up a little bit short. But I thought that Boston College win for us in the semifinal was maybe one of the best wins for Quinnipiac ever.

They were loaded. I think they had 16, 17 draft picks. They had first- and second-rounders, Demko in net. Nobody gave us a chance to win that game, no one other than the boys in the locker room. That was a huge win and I think a benchmark for Quinnipiac's program.

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