

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Boston U. vs Minnesota

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Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Minnesota Gophers Coach Bob Motzko

Semifinal Media Conference



Q. Your thoughts as we head towards Tampa?

COACH MOTZKO: There's no question that we are an excited group. I mean, you first have to -- how hard it is to get through these things. And I have lived this for so long. And you've got to be lucky and you've got to be good. And things go your way. And you can't take it for granted. And how fortunate we are that we're able to pop our way through the Fargo Regional.

The fact we've had such a horrible winter here in Minnesota, I think there going to be a whole lot of people heading south to get to Tampa, from what I'm understanding. It's going to be crazy. So we are excited.

Q. Wanted to get your thoughts on the matchup against BU and some of the points of focus that you guys are going to have this week in practice and next week?

COACH MOTZKO: I'm going to be real honest that you're catching us when we're coming back. We're digging into BU right now. So, specifics, 29 wins, a defenseman that's just been outstanding that's leading scorer on their team. A first-year coach that's done a terrific job. You know they're loaded with talent and they're on a hot streak right now, too.

So we're going to dig into them all week as we're going through and put our game plan together as we move through the week. But right now it's been a little bit of rest and recovery. We gave them Monday off and we're just actually getting back at it today and get this thing going.

Q. You always hear of how difficult it is for freshmen in their first year NCAAs. I'm curious to get your thoughts on why you feel five of the top 10 NCAA point producers this season happen to be freshmen? I know there are two from your club? Is it a anomaly or do you see a trend? Is it the work or coaching leading up

to the college level? What do you think?

COACH MOTZKO: Well, they're terrific players, number one. They're special players, Cooley, Snuggerud, Fantilli, Hutson. I know there's more out there, these freshmen that have just had terrific seasons and track records of that.

There's a path for freshmen to be good in college hockey. It's always been there. This might be just one of those hot years where it's there. And I don't know if I'd dig into it as much as the question you asked, why. I'm just darned glad we have a couple of them here, to be honest with you. But we'll get into it.

But the key to our team is still our older guys that are back with us. But they are sure good players. We've seen enough clips of all these guys throughout the whole season. That's a special group.

Q. Going back to the freshmen, particularly Logan Cooley, here's a guy who comes from out of state and obviously one of the elite players of college hockey. But you look at the way he can kind of take over games, that's what we don't necessarily see a whole lot. What have you seen in terms of his development and his ability to continue to elevate especially at this late stage of the season?

COACH MOTZKO: Logan -- and I put Snuggerud in the same category -- but Logan, his skating ability is elite. His skill is elite. And that alone sets him apart. But the greatest skill factor in him is his compete level.

I mean, he is an ornery, tough competitor. And I know I've said it a few times in the last week when you -- any other coach would tell you, they'd rather put a fire out than start one. And we have to put fires out with him. That's what's great with him.

The more he gets into it, the more he gets his blood going -- and we tell him, you can go to the edge but don't cross the edge in his feistiness. Let it come out in your talent. And he's really developed in that.

He took a major penalty early in the year, at Michigan, and

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it was a pretty heated series, obviously. And I'm just guessing this, sitting out -- and he got suspended a game for it.

And you know what? I think he didn't like sitting out. And he said, I have to learn a lesson here. I have to keep my energy in focus and in check and just keep it in hockey. And I think that was a great learning moment for him.

And he just continually gets better. He continually wants the puck in big moments and he's not afraid of any moment. And with all that, he doesn't even shave yet. That's what's crazy. He is just a young, young fireball that is so fun.

Q. You coached Thomas Vanek as a freshman in Juniors. Do you see any parallels between him and Logan Cooley?

COACH MOTZKO: Yeah, I mean, different types of players. Thomas was a natural scorer. If Thomas played today, he'd still score. He's been off for a while. He has that ability -- he loves to be in front of the net.

Logan's a driver. Logan's a true center. He's gotten so much better in the defensive zone and all areas of his game. But the fact -- I always remember one thing with Thomas and Logan, when they get the puck the whole rink freezes. Other team, coaches, players and the fans, there's a pause and everyone waits to see what's going to happen when the great ones get it.

And I saw Thomas have that, when I was coaching him when he was 15, 16 years old, down in Sioux Falls. He brought it here to Minnesota. And now being around Logan this year, the same thing.

We all, our team and our fans and I think opposing teams, they wait to see what's going to happen. There's a pause just for a second and then you wait for it again. And that's just that "it" factor that players like that have.

Q. Wanted to ask about your two previous trips to the Frozen Four as a head coach in 2013 and last year, and just kind of what lessons you take from those. I know you're always learning and growing. And what did you learn from those two previous trips?

COACH MOTZKO: I don't like losing the first game. I can tell you that. There's nothing worse than having to get on a plane and leave. I'm just going to say, I think there's -- sometimes I think programs have to -- thank goodness we punched our ticket to get back again because we have guys that have been there.

We scored the first goal last year and we never really got off again. And there's so much pageantry going on this week and we have older guys that can help guide that. Every family member is going down. You have you to embrace it. But you've got to keep your focus on what's in front of you.

And hopefully there's a lesson from our guys from a year ago that -- just how to stay in the moment, that they can lend some leadership down to our young guys. Once the parents all have their tickets and their hotels and their travel plans, yes, we're going to -- I want them to enjoy and embrace every moment.

But there has to be a time where you shut it all off and it's back to hockey and it's back to the task at hand. And my hope right now is that we have enough leadership that lived that last year and can take the next step.

Q. You've been progressing with this program the last couple of years. You had a team that was ready to go to Penn State and COVID knocked it out. You had a team that goes to the Frozen Four last year. You're back again. Are there any specifics you see out of your players that are different, how they handle the pressure and the situation right now at this time of the year?

COACH MOTZKO: I can't answer that -- I thought we were ready last year. We had some injuries last year that affected us. And we've got one right now, too, that we'll see how the week progresses, because, boy, when you get down to the end, you're playing -- we're playing a team with 29 wins in Boston University. And it is going to be a tug-of-war match and you want to have all hands on deck.

So I just love our leadership. I love our talent. We're in a great spot. We've just got to get after it and get down there and play our game.

And I think maybe, like I said, the lesson learned last year is maybe there were some distractions that got into us. You don't ever want to overanalyze it. Give Mankato a ton of credit a year ago.

But this is a new year, new group. And we're in a good spot. We're in a good spot. I can't wait to play. And I'm really happy that we got the first game.

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