

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

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Boston U. Terriers

Coach Jay Pandolfo

Domenick Fensore

Jay O'Brien

Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



COACH PANDOLFO: We're excited to be here. It's been a long journey, but it's been a fun one. I'm really proud of this group. Proud of these guys right here. They came back to BU as seniors for a reason.

This is one of their goals. And they've done a tremendous job this year leading our group. Really happy for them. Really happy for the whole group. So we're excited.

Tampa is a great spot to have a Frozen Four. It's great to be here. Anytime you're still playing hockey when the weather is hot, you know you're doing pretty well.

MODERATOR: Domenick, how was the trip in?

DOMENICK FENSORE: It was great. Nice charter plane ride in. And good greet from the kids and the fans. It was pretty cool. The red carpet was out there. It was fun. It was awesome. I know the guys loved it on our team. We definitely enjoyed it.

MODERATOR: Jay, what's the top moment so far?

JAY O'BRIEN: Top moment? I would say this is, Dom said, walking off the plane, seeing the band and the little kids and parents, it's pretty cool. Not many people are able to experience that. And just really fortunate to be here.

Q. Dom and Jay, can you go back to the summer when you decided you were coming back for your senior year; what were the conversations like among the players, among that senior class?

JAY O'BRIEN: Obviously we got knocked out in the Hockey East Tournament to UConn last year. And we had a lot of juniors on that team, right now are seniors. And a

couple of us, I know me and Dom, kind of sat down and kind of looked at each other and we were, like, we're not ready to leave this program. We're not ready to leave this university.

Our teammates, the staff, we just felt like we had a lot of unfinished business left to do at Boston University.

So, yeah, there were some conversations. Like Pando said, come back to BU for these moments, to be in the Frozen Four and to be one of the top teams in the country. Like I said, I'm really proud to be here, to be a Terrier. And I wouldn't change my decision for anything. I just love this place and just a big reason why I stayed. And I know Dom would say the same thing.

DOMENICK FENSORE: Looking at my time over at BU, last year we won a Beanpot but that's not the goal when you come to BU. You want to raise as many banners and trophies as you can.

But like Jay said, it's a lot of unfinished business. We want to be remembered here. We want to leave a legacy, be a part of the history. Like Coach Pando, you came here to win a national championship. His teammates probably still talk to each other today, just how special it is, the bond they have together.

It's kind of what I wanted to come back and do. We've done a great job so far. We have two more wins to do it.

Q. Zabs and Skoog both on the ice for practice. What's their availability for this weekend?

COACH PANDOLFO: Zabaneh's practiced the last two days on a line. He's close. I wouldn't be surprised if he's in the lineup.

Skoog, still a question mark. It'll be a game-time decision on him.

Q. I'm curious what you can tell us about your coach and the kind of, we'll say, energy that he brings to you guys or how he's helped you find success this year.

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DOMENICK FENSORE: Coach Pando has been awesome. He's a breath of fresh air. He comes in every day, works hard. So dedicated to this program. Works out 7.00 a.m. every day.

COACH PANDOLFO: 6:00.

DOMENICK FENSORE: 6:00? Sorry. (Laughter).

See, I didn't even know that. But he's awesome. So dedicated to us, wants to get us better. That's what you look for in a coach. He's been awesome this year.

JAY O'BRIEN: To build off that, obviously Pando was an assistant last year, so we got to know him pretty well and you kind of also know about the success he's had at every single level.

But then as you get to know him you realize what kind of person he is and how much he cares not only about his players but his staff and the program and everybody surrounding BU. And I couldn't think of a better person to lead us.

And our success this year, a lot of it I would say is due to him leading us. And me and Dom's role as captains is to try to follow suit and do what we can. But just his passion and work ethic and just love for the game has rubbed off on all of us.

Q. By now you've looked at video. What's your scouting report on Minnesota what do they do that will worry them and what do you do that worries them?

DOMENICK FENSORE: Obviously they have a lot of talent over there. They have a great first line. Our job is to kind of take away time and space for those guys and kind of disrupt them any way we can.

And honestly it's just how we play. Puck management will be a big thing against them, making good decisions with the puck and not throwing it away and holding onto them down low. We have a lot of creative forwards as well. So it's going to be their job to kind of hold onto pucks and make plays down low.

JAY O'BRIEN: Pretty much covered it all. I think in these types of games, you've got to keep it simple, especially early and get pucks behind them and kind of go to work. And I think, especially in these games, just staying even keel throughout the whole game.

It's going to be a loud atmosphere, and we're fortunate enough to have played in a couple of those big venues this year, which I think will hopefully help us. But I think staying

even keeled throughout the game is kind of a big thing going into it.

Q. Coach, we've heard a lot in football and basketball how big NIL has become. How, if at all, has NIL affected your job and your path here?

COACH PANDOLFO: Up to this point it hasn't affected BU too much. I'm sure it's going to keep growing. But at this point right now it hasn't been a big factor for us.

Q. How does your senior experience help you against maybe a younger Minnesota team?

JAY O'BRIEN: Obviously we have, whatever it is, 10, 12 seniors who have, I think, have been through a lot with this program, some ups and some downs. And I think we've handled ourselves very well.

And this is our last crack at it. This is our last go at winning anything in college hockey. And a national championship is just an incredible way to hopefully go out.

But obviously we have a lot of guys who don't wear letters who are just as big of leaders as myself and Dom. I think we all bring our own aspect, our own way of leading this team. And our senior class has stepped up greatly this year and will continue to do so.

Q. Jay, you had success in not one but two national semifinals against the Gophers. One in their backyard in St. Paul in '94. And one on the way to the national championship in '95 in Providence. What do you recall about those two? One thing I recall, you were injured down the stretch in '95 but came down with an injury to play?

COACH PANDOLFO: The '95 one, I had a bunch of injuries that year. And I had a hand injury in the Beanpot and was able to come back I think for the final three NCAA games.

At this level there's only so many games, so many opportunities. So guys are going to do whatever they can to play. And that's what Nick Zabaneh and Wilmer Skoog are doing right now.

And you don't get these opportunities very often. Great to see they're doing everything they can. It means a lot.

These guys are understanding it; you get to this point it's hard to get here but it's even harder to win. You want to enjoy the moment and leave it out there and do whatever you can for the team. And that's what these guys have done all year.

Q. You beat the Gophers in '95 (indiscernible)?

COACH PANDOLFO: I know the rivalry in the '70s was talked about a lot. I know we played them in '94 and '95. I don't remember it being as big a rivalry then just because we didn't see them other than that one game. And I think back then they played on a little bit more of a regular basis.

It's always fun to beat a big program like Minnesota. So hopefully we can have the same result tomorrow.

Q. Jay, as much as they talked about coming back, as a first-year head coach how much were you able to rely on your seniors? And maybe especially at that time around the Beanpot when things weren't going swimmingly?

COACH PANDOLFO: I rely on these guys a lot. They've made my job easy. I talk to them a lot.

The Beanpot stretch, I think we went into that thinking we were going to defend it -- and I don't know if we thought it was going to be easy. But when we lost, we got down as a group, I felt.

And we were on a role going into it. As a coach I might have started letting some things slip because we were doing so well and then some stuff started bubbling up. These guys came to me. We talked -- I have an open door policy for these guys; they can come in and talk about anything that's on their mind.

They came in, addressed some things with me. We sat down and talked about it. We met as a group.

For these guys to be that mature and be able to come in and talk to me and address some things, I think it helped us and I think it's a big reason why we're here right now.

These guys are mature enough to figure that out. I give them a lot of credit and I have all year long. It's made my job really easy as a first-year head coach to have this type of support from our leadership group. You're not always going to have that. So it's been great.

Q. How would you describe the Hutson brothers, who they are on and off the ice and just the immediate impact they've been able to bring to this program?

JAY O'BRIEN: Obviously both their play speaks for itself. I actually got to know Quinn a little bit when I was in Penticton, and he was touring and he was looking for a spot to land in juniors. So I took him out to dinner. Went to a game with him. I was actually hurt. Took him out to

dinner and watched the Penticton game with him. Got to know him a little bit.

Didn't know much about Lane. Heard he was a quiet, shy kid, which he still is; still waiting for him to open up a little bit.

But they're great kids, great hockey players. And we're very lucky to have them.

DOMENICK FENSORE: They love the game so much. They come to the rink every day with a great attitude. Want to work and compete. And that's what we try to build this year. Those are two great guys that play into what we wanted to do.

And Quinn can score goals. That's a big thing for us. And Lane is one of the smartest guys on the ice every time he's out there. So they've been awesome for us and hopefully they can keep it going here for the next two games.

Q. You were on that Providence team in '19 that made the Frozen Four. You didn't get to play. Could you talk about your personal journey of maybe a little redemption here getting to play finally in the Frozen four and what that journey has been like?

JAY O'BRIEN: Obviously it's been quite the journey. I wouldn't have, I guess, drawn this one up. But I'm so happy that it happened and I'm truly blessed to be in this position again to be able to play.

Obviously I was injured in that Frozen four. It was tough to watch from up top. But just really fortunate to be in this position, to be with this incredible group of guys, great coaching staff. It's just an honor to be here and I'm just really excited. Going to make the most of it.

Q. Coach, this area has a really rabid following for the NHL team, the Tampa Bay Lightning. Some of the locals may not be as familiar with college hockey. I know there's a huge following for the people that love college hockey. Could you describe that following and what it is about college hockey that keeps people coming and the popularity of the sport not only for your program but overall?

COACH PANDOLFO: I think it's just a great product. I think if you look at a lot of the college hockey teams, they have a number of players that are drafted that have aspirations to play in the National Hockey League.

And I think some of the places where the colleges are there's not a lot of pro sports so they love their programs. A lot of these people have loved the programs for a long

time.

I know there's people that go to the national championship wherever it is every single year. I think that's a big part of it.

I think Tampa does a tremendous job. I came down in '16. I was doing player development for Boston at the time. Came down to watch (indiscernible) and Denver. I was shocked how great a job they did and how excited people were here to watch college hockey. It was a lot of fun. I think it's going to be a similar environment this year.

It's great to see. And it's great to see in a warm-weather place like Tampa. Obviously the success they've had in the National Hockey League with the Stanley Cups and how great an organization they have been for the last 20 years it's been a lot of fun. It just keeps growing the game.

Q. You're on a nine-game winning streak. What's the key to that and what type of confidence does that bring to you?

DOMENICK FENSORE: I think throughout the nine games we've seen people buy into their roles. After the Beanpot stretch, we were losing games. And we kind of came together as a team and said we've got to buy into each other's roles.

And obviously we have a guy like Dylan Peterson who is a really skilled player, could be on a power play anywhere else. He's really bought into his role. And Nick Zabaneh, have formed a connection there.

Those are guys -- that's how you win championship; you rely on your depth and your role players. A guy like Sam Stevens, Jamie Armstrong, Devin Kaplan, that line has been unbelievable for us down the stretch. It's really coming together now. Hopefully they can -- two more games here.

JAY O'BRIEN: Honestly, that's exactly what I was going to say. I think we're very fortunate to have a lot of depth on this team. And it's kind of been a different guy every weekend, or a different couple of guys every weekend which has been great to see.

And like Dom said, guys know their role. They've bought into their roles. And I think just everything's kind of clicking for us on the ice, off the ice. The guys just love being around each other. Even at dinner last night, just laughing the whole time.

And just the first thing that comes to mind for me is how special this group is off the ice, which leads to success on

the ice. That's kind of been the biggest thing for me.

Q. At the selection show announcement you guys were pretty subdued. Does that just sort of speak to that there was unfinished business, that that just wasn't the goal to get into the tournament, that you guys still had more to prove?

JAY O'BRIEN: Yeah. Obviously, like you said, it's great to make the tournament, but I kind of think to my sophomore year, me and Dom's sophomore year here. Made the tournament; lost in the first game.

We're obviously very happy, happy to make the tournament. But like you said, it's just one step closer in the right direction where we want to be. And just took it game by game there in the regional. And that's what we're going to do here.

DOMENICK FENSORE: I think for our group, we're never really satisfied. So we always want more. We always want to get better. I think it starts in practice. We always compete with each other and kind of push each other to become better. And I think that kind of leads to the game.

And, like, in the regionals there, we wanted more. We had a good game against Western. But then we knew we had a tough test with Cornell. We knew it was going to be tough, knew it was going to be a battle. Especially into these games, we're never satisfied. We want more. This is why you come to BU, you come to win a national championship. That's what we're going to do here.

Q. Coach, if you compare last week's Cornell win to the game you played in January even, seemed like -- even to some of the Hockey East tournament games, the way that your defense played, sort of just flawlessly getting pucks in and out, did something click recently with that? Any difference in the way you were coaching them to play? And, more importantly, I guess, how do you sustain that this weekend?

COACH PANDOLFO: I think for the most part, over the course of the year, I think we've been a pretty good defensive team. I thought during that stretch where we weren't playing well, we got away from that.

We weren't playing desperate hockey enough. I think that's a big part of having a good defense is playing desperate.

I thought seeing Cornell back in January, when we played them the first time, really helped us. It was a tremendous hockey game, but they took it to us quite a bit during that game. And we knew that we were going to have to play

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better defensively to match that. So like to our guys' credit, we go over some stuff that we need to get better at, and these guys, all year long, have taken what we've talked about and they've gone out there and done it. That's what their mindset has been the last month or so now, where we're just playing the right way, playing to our identity. And it's resulting in wins. And we're certainly going to need more of that with the team we're playing tomorrow.

I don't know if there's a better offensive team in all of college hockey. So we have to make sure we're sticking to our structure. Dom talked earlier, the puck management piece is huge against this team. But I think it's just the buy-in from the players, understanding that we're not going to outscore teams every single night. We have to play defense as well.

Q. What kind of role has Ty Gallagher played in your season, and how have you seen him grow as a leader in his second season here?

COACH PANDOLFO: Ty's a mature player. Him and Dom have been partners now for pretty much two years. So I think they have a chemistry together. They kind of know where each other are all the time. Dom likes to get up ice. Galley knows that. He'll stay back when it's his turn to stay back. He's a competitive kid. He's a mature kid. He's a leader in our group as a sophomore. He just keeps getting better every week.

Q. What is it about Lane Hutson that makes him so special and allows him to do the things that he does?

COACH PANDOLFO: I don't know if I can pinpoint one thing. I think his hockey sense is off the charts. I think he thinks two or three steps ahead of the guys he's playing against. I think his competitiveness is also something that's off the charts. He's one of the most competitive guys I've been around. Wants to get better every single day.

I think all these little things that he does just separates him. He wants to win, too. I think that's one of the most important things. He's obviously accomplished a ton this year as a freshman. One of the best freshman seasons ever for a defenseman. He's more into the winning than individual accomplishments. I think that's what's special about him. The kid's a winner.

DOMENICK FENSORE: He's awesome. He's my roommate. So we like to mess around and have some fun. He's a great guy. I think he's a great player, but he's an even better kid. Comes to the rink every day, wants to work, wants to get better. Pushes his teammates. Like, that's all you can ask for in a teammate. He's been awesome.

JAY O'BRIEN: He likes to go on the ice a little late at night sometimes. But -- by himself, maybe with someone else, I don't know. (Laughter) he's got the 24-hour access card to the rink. Can't get my hands on one of those. That's all I've got.

Q. Interested in all perspectives here. This two weeks or week and a half between the games, it seems, in some respects, like an eternity. In other respects, it seems like you blinked and it was gone. How have you guys used these past ten days to prepare yourself for this opportunity?

MODERATOR: How do you like the break?

COACH PANDOLFO: I liked it for our team right now because of some injuries we've had. It gave us a chance to get healthy. It gave us a chance to get some rest. We've had guys, because of the injuries, play heavy minutes for us. Not only in the Hockey East championship but in the regionals.

I think, for us, it's been good to get our guys a little bit of rest going into Tampa. I think we're on a roll too. So sometimes you want to keep going. But I think it benefits us with the rest we've had and gives us time to prepare, too, for a really good team we're playing.

DOMENICK FENSORE: I think Coach pretty much hit it on the head there. But just a lot of rest for us. And some guys are obviously a bit banged up. But obviously every team is too, so it will benefit them as well. We've just got to clear our minds a little bit and kind of get back to work here.

Q. What about the (indiscernible) aspect of the game?

JAY O'BRIEN: We've definitely been able to do that as well. I think we've done a good job of watching some video, as we do every week versus every opponent that we're going to play. Obviously kind of looking to some of their tendencies throughout their game and work on a couple of things and combine that with rest. I think it's a good recipe for us.

Q. Any beach time before the agenda?

COACH PANDOLFO: No beach. A nap and dinner.

Q. I was told you guys are in charge of the locker room playlist. Is it different than the one you've had for the rest of the year, and how did you come up with it?

DOMENICK FENSORE: We switch off. Like, I'm more of a country guy. I like to chill vibes. Jay takes the pregame rap and hip hop.

JAY O'BRIEN: You say it like it's a bad thing.

DOMENICK FENSORE: I'm not. I'm just saying, like, I'm a chill vibe guy. What do you think about it?

JAY O'BRIEN: I think like this morning Dom had country going. A little slow for me sometimes. He knows that.

DOMENICK FENSORE: Everyone's different.

JAY O'BRIEN: Whoever is feeling it, we just kind of grab it and go from there. Sometimes we'll take some suggestions and that sort of thing. But just try to get the boys going or keep the boys relaxed, whatever the kind of mood is.

Q. Luke Holmes?

DOMENICK FENSORE: Yes, huge Luke Holmes.
(Indiscernible) I love country.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

DOMENICK FENSORE: Yes.

Q. Coach, what's on your playlist?

COACH PANDOLFO: Went to a Bruce Springsteen concert couple weeks ago. Big Boss fan. Big Boss fan.

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