

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

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Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Coach Bob Motzko

Jimmy Snuggerud

Ryan Johnson

Ryan Chesley

Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



them, and they said the same stuff, just enjoy the moment and have fun with it. It's been really fun to be here.

Q. How did you guys use this ten days? A lot of times it feels like it's an eternity and other times it feels like it was a blink and you're here. So how have you used that not only in terms of rest, preparing yourself mentally, but also technically? And are there things you wanted to see different heading into this opportunity.

JIMMY SNUGGERUD: The coaching staff did a good job putting things in place for what we need to do against BU and hopefully, eventually the championship game. Throughout the week we kind of stuck to our practice schedule. And we did the things we normally do to get ready for these types of games. So they did a great job of that.

RYAN CHESLEY: It's been good. Same practices, keeping the same routine going. I think just keeping our emotions pretty level. Not getting too excited. Not getting too down. Just kind of staying level. We're just happy to be here.

RYAN JOHNSON: It's been a lot of fun, honestly, having an extra week and a half to spend time with the team. Our season could have ended. It could have ended a while ago, but we're still here.

And just every week just so grateful, so grateful to be with the team and the guys, and we're putting a lot of preparation and work into this week. And it's exciting.

MODERATOR: Motz, do you like the break?

COACH MOTZKO: No, but it's the same for all of us. We all had the time off. We kind of went on a hard every other day, the region was an every other day, and that's what this is.

We'd only played four games in the last -- so we're fresh. We had one minor, one injury that was healing up. So we pushed fairly hard over the last ten days.

COACH MOTZKO: Back in Minnesota, all the airports are shut town again. Miserable winter. Tampa Bay is an unbelievable place for all of us to be. We're excited to be here.

It's a great regional to pop our way through out of Fargo and to get back here. It's such a special moment.

And we've got a veteran group of guys and 11 freshmen. We've got a group that went through it a year ago and we've got some young guys for their first experience. But our older guys are paving the way for us. And we're in a good spot.

MODERATOR: Guys, what's been happening in Tampa since you've been here?

RYAN JOHNSON: It's a great opportunity and love the success. We just want to keep it rolling and be focused. There's a lot of exciting things around us, a lot of hype and we're just going to try to keep our eyes on what's important and just stay within our teams, stay within the group and not be worried about the distractions.

RYAN CHESLEY: Trip in was good, flight was good. Very nice weather. Pretty hot. A lot different from Minnesota.

But it's been good so far. I think R.J. summed it up really well, just try not to get too caught up in the outside noise and distractions and focus on what's going on at hand.

JIMMY SNUGGERUD: Paul Martin did a great job of showing us what the alumni had to say with our journey and stuff. We went through a lot of leadership skills with



I was most impressed, like last Saturday, this past Saturday, you know, we had a morning practice, and you're just wondering how they're going to be. And they were dialed in. But it's kind of been an MO for our team from day one. They had great focus. We got after it. They competed hard.

And when it was all done, I remember the staff looked at each other, okay, we're good. And there were no buttons to push. That's been the MO of this group. Great leadership. Great group of guys. They really do play for each other. There's been some sacrifices out of that group. That's how the week went.

Q. The picture of John Mayasich getting on the plain yesterday. I know you made a concerted effort to reach out to some of the real legends of Gopher hockey. What it did mean bringing him along on this trip? And for you what does it mean to see some of those legendary M guys here?

COACH MOTZKO: Me being a little older, to kind of unite with him when we took our trip to Eveleth, and he said, if you go to Tampa I'm coming with. And his son reached out and said, where does he meet you? He's coming. And he's so excited.

So I'm probably the next most excited with some of the older people. And I hope these guys get it. He told me, I haven't been to a Frozen Four in 60 years. He goes, my first one since he played in the Frozen Four.

And someone look up the date. He told me how many years, because he's a lot sharper than I am. And it was great. He had a Gopher bag that he used as a player. It's still in great condition. And it's pretty special.

MODERATOR: Do you know much about him, having one of the great players with you on the journey?

RYAN CHESLEY: It was special seeing him on the trip with us, knowing everything he's done and contributed to the program in history. So I think it's just a really cool moment.

RYAN JOHNSON: It was cool to meet him in Eveleth and getting to know him. I actually know his relative, Sam, in Sioux Falls. It's cool to meet his great uncle.

MODERATOR: Did he give you any tips?

JIMMY SNUGGERUD: No, it's obviously cool to see his history and what he's done for this program. Not a lot of tips. I'm sure he just wants us to win this thing.

Q. This is the third time this event has been here. There's always been a comparison of the teams, hey, the temperature back where you come from is there, and it's 80-plus here. And I know we're getting great weather for you guys. I understand the weather has been tough in Minnesota this winter. So is it bizarre to go out of your hotel and see the sun out and to not have weather be a factor? What's that juxtaposition like of the winter you've had and then you're here?

COACH MOTZKO: In just a couple of weeks we're going to gather down in Florida for the American Hockey Coaches Association. And I'll make a plea it be here at least every third year. We'll let a couple of other people have it.

But just to know that it is a destination that people want to go this time of year. I'm sure it's the same in Boston. I know it's that way in Duluth. I know it's that way in the Twin Cities. And I was here, I think it was the first one they had. They do such a fantastic job with the event. And this is a pretty special place to be. The sun's not going to bother any of us. Let it come.

MODERATOR: R.J., are you enjoying Tampa? Do you vote every third year?

RYAN JOHNSON: Maybe switch it up, go to California. Just across to the other coast.

COACH MOTZKO: R.J. is from California, if you all know that.

Q. NIL has been a huge deal in football and basketball in particular. I'm curious, how, if at all, it's affected your program and where do you see that going?

COACH MOTZKO: Hockey is behind a little bit in the conversation. Like the portal now is two years in and all we hear is the craziness in football and basketball in the portal. All of a sudden, now it's getting a little crazy in hockey.

I think it's going to be a conversation that's going to heat up more and more in hockey over the next couple of years.

We just don't have that many teams compared to football and basketball. But it's starting to heat up. And there are more discussions. You're hearing million-dollar deals for football and basketball. Our players get burritos. But I think times are changing.

Q. The depth of this team is something that you've often mentioned. The first line is elite. Your top defensemen are elite. To give us perspective on the

depth of this team, how it's played over the course of the year to come in here as the No. 1 seed?

COACH MOTZKO: The greatest depth I can give you is, like, our defensive corps, which is something I've never had or even seen with a D corps this deep. And it started a year ago when Ryan and LaCombe -- and we didn't think any of them would be coming back. But these young guys are now experienced, their experienced at Minnesota and what we're doing.

They all came back, two for their senior and one for their junior. So they get a lot of the accolades.

Then all of a sudden behind that, Mike Koster is a junior, he gives us great depth. But our three freshmen defensemen with Chesley, Mittelstadt and Cal Thomas, they get a little hidden in that. Two of them were on the World Junior team. That's the depth of our D corps.

But what's been most amazing about it is Faber a year ago was playing 29, 30 minutes a night. And he's down to 21, 22. But his production is an all-time level. That everybody sacrificed, where you're talking just a few minutes here, few minutes more from our younger guys. They have been all about team. They've all been about each other.

To your point where we red-shirted one of our older defensemen because of the depth there. And as a coach now sitting here knowing we were going to have this depth, and now we're here at the end of the year and the thing I'm most proud of is how they've been all about the team.

And I've got one freshmen defensemen, his minutes are going to triple next year. But he's been a huge part of our success. And the same thing with -- it took a while for our 11 freshmen. But I know Cooley and Snuggerud and Knies get a lot of attention, deservedly so. But the depth of the Huglen line or the Nelson line sometimes don't get talked about as much, but they're the reason we're here. And our team knows that.

So it's the shortest version of answer I can give you on our depth. It's one thing to have depth but it's another thing to have the players that have accepted it and they love the ride we're on. And we wouldn't be here if we wouldn't have had that depth or had the attitudes that these guys have had. It's been awesome.

Q. You've got a veteran team, but you've got a lot of younger guys too, compared to BU which has a lot of upperclassmen. Does that factor into your approach?

COACH MOTZKO: That's one of those things, it is what it is. We're here because of our youth and our depth of our

older guys. We can't really look at the other team we're playing because almost every team we played this year, every team we won was older than us, by a lot.

It doesn't affect us. We get pucks deep, don't take penalties, win faceoffs. We take care of and manage the game, we'll be in a good spot.

RYAN JOHNSON: We're ready for the battle. We've been tested early in the year and we've been tested throughout the season. I think we're just work in preparation for us.

Q. What jumps out about BU on tape when you look at them?

COACH MOTZKO: The depth, they can match any team in the country with depth. High-end defensemen, good goaltending. Won their league. Won their playoff. Won their region. They're clearly the favorite here. So with 11 seniors, there were a lot of things that jumped out about BU that I like.

RYAN CHESLEY: I just think they've got a lot of elite-level talent. They've got a lot of depth. And just familiar with a lot of names on that team and know what they can do. So I think we've just got to play our game and I think we'll have success.

Q. An update, you said last week on Connor Kurth, (indiscernible). Any update on his condition?

COACH MOTZKO: 100 percent. Truly.

Q. Ryan and Jimmy, mostly because I feel you have more to contribute, but what makes Logan such a dynamic player, what makes him so special? Why does he deserve to win the Hobey. And if I get the microphone back I'll ask about Matty. Don't try to compare. I just want to know about Logan right now.

JIMMY SNUGGERUD: Obviously known him the past two years, it's been pretty special. The things he's accomplished are pretty unbelievable. He's only improved in those last two years.

I think for him to possibly have that Hobey Baker as a team we're happy for him, to see that for him. And his skill set, he's improved on his shot, things like that. His skating has even improved, his corner work. Just the way he plays the game is pretty special.

RYAN CHESLEY: Obviously Logan is an unbelievable player, and I think what gets talked about a lot is his skills and talent on the ice. But what stands out to me is his compete and love for the game and his teammates. He's

just an incredibly hard worker, loves the game and plays it the right way. And I think that's what stands out most to me.

COACH MOTZKO: Can I add one point to that? They're on the same line but then the other kid on the end of the line down here that had 50 points, like, he could be in the same conversation. So it's been a special group. But I think they like playing with each other a lot.

MODERATOR: Want to comment on Knies?

COACH MOTZKO: He's kind of the big bully. When he's got a little bully mode in him, he clears the path and a real good hockey player to boot. I know his numbers aren't as big as, when I read a couple of articles, as the other two candidates for the Hobey.

But from our standpoint, we wouldn't be in our position without either of them. So the importance to what they meant, what Matt has gone through over the last two years to our team, is far more measured than being 15 or 20 points behind someone else because he's an awful good hockey player.

RYAN JOHNSON: Let's just say he's fun to be around. Makes the guys laugh in the locker room. I'm sure these two have probably better stories than me. But just it's fun to be around him.

Q. What about your perspective on what makes him special on the ice (indiscernible)?

RYAN JOHNSON: I think obviously his talent and compete level seems like always 100 percent on the ice. And that's really rare to find in a game, I think. I think it's hard to take him off the puck, too. And the amount of times he's stepped up in big moments in games for us has been huge for us and been cool to see. Contributing to the success of our team, as Coach said, both of those two have done a great job.

Q. Wanted to ask about Justen. If you could reflect on his career with you all and what has he meant to your program to stick around in the way he has?

COACH MOTZKO: One of the more remarkable stories that I've had in coaching. He comes out of a small community in Saskatchewan. He's our third goalie. And it was either the first or second year -- sometimes when you have a third goalie that doesn't play -- at the end-of-year meeting, are you happy?

The guys loved him. He's just a terrific young man. And he said, Coach, I'm here; when you need me I'm here. But

I'm here to make the team better every day. That's how we practice.

And we had a Richter Award winner in net. Great kid as well. But somehow his path chose to leave. And then it was tag. He had the first right to the net. And it's, like, he went in -- you've got to know him -- as calm and cool as a human can be.

I've been waiting for this. And the guys that follow us every day, he has been about the exact same from the moment he went in. He just gives us that steady confidence to the point, he's been the number one goalie for a year and a half. And at the end of the year, I think there are some programs that would have gone out and looked for another goalie.

I couldn't do it to him. I said this is our guy. This is our guy, we're going to go with him, and with half a year of work.

And here we sit at the end of the year, and he's our backbone. And spent a couple minutes with him -- and these guys will tell you -- he's just an unbelievable human. And it's just one of those cool stories in sports. He's not a walk-on anymore. He's one of the big leaders of our team and why we're here.

RYAN CHESLEY: I'd like to say he's probably one of the most calm and steady people that I know. He's never too emotional. Just keeps his emotions in check during games and practice especially. Just always focused and driven. And he just helps steady our boat this season.

Q. There's a lot of history with Minnesota and being here. It seems like you guys are always in the conversation. But whether it's not being able to even make it to the Frozen four but simply not being able to get it done, what is going to make it different this year that this is going to be the year that the Gophers are on top?

COACH MOTZKO: That's a fun one. You've got a coach out here that's won three of them sitting right here. This NCAA Tournament, you know whoever coined March Madness, it's a one-and-done deal. And why did it take Boston College 50 years to win one? Remember they went 50 years? And Michigan hasn't won -- I've been reading it -- since '96. And us 2003.

It's so bloody hard. And I was fortunate as an assistant, and Steve Miller has done it three times. And you cherish the moment. But any one thing, one injury, one guy gets sick this week, you know, in a one-and-done. It's not a best-of-seven. It's not a best-of-five.

Some of the great teams in history of hockey have not won. And why this year? If we do, because we've got the right guys. If it happens.

But every play matters. All I can tell you about our group is we're a confident group, not from our ability. We're confident with each other. We're confident where they really like each other. We're confident we're going to put our best foot forward.

And if we don't turn pucks over, if we don't take penalties, if we get good saves when we need them, we'll have a really good chance to do it.

So there's my coach that's going to come out. It's bloody hard just to get here so many things have happened in these regions.

And any of the four teams here has a chance. I don't know if there's been a tournament in a while that's so dead even as you're seeing this year. And if we do, it's because we did a lot of little things the right way.

Q. What's on the playlist in the locker room? Who is in charge of the music? We asked the BU guys too, I'd like to know, what do you guys listen to?

JIMMY SNUGGERUD: Usually Kniesy on the tunes, some funny stories about what he plays sometimes. But usually just pump up before games. He was playing country after practice a bit. But whatever he's feeling is what we're listening to.

COACH MOTZKO: That's the bully. (Laughter).

MODERATOR: R.J., what's the variety on the playlist? We heard country, what else is on there?

RYAN JOHNSON: There's some EDM. Mostly I'd say EDM is mostly the pregame and then country for practice.

MODERATOR: Chesley, any vetoes in there?

RYAN CHESLEY: No, I think he does a pretty good job with it. He plays what he likes and I think most of the guys like that, too. So it's good.

MODERATOR: Motz, do you like the playlist?

COACH MOTZKO: I love it. I'm not sure -- every once in a while I'll go, who sings this, and then I'll put it on my Spotify. Every once in a while do I do that. It's usually when the country is going.

MODERATOR: You don't have EDM going?

COACH MOTZKO: No, I don't know what that is. (Laughter).

Q. Your fathers both played for the Gophers. Any advice did they give you going into this tournament?

JIMMY SNUGGERUD: Obviously my dad has been here. He lost the national championship game to Harvard. He knows what's it like to lose this game. He just told me, maybe the past five, 10 years of my life, how much he hated losing that game, and this past year how much he wants us to win this thing.

But it's definitely some good advice obviously from both of our fathers having that history. It's been cool to have that.

RYAN JOHNSON: I think my dad's just more like been an encouragement to me this year. He's just been just offering advice just being prepared, getting ready and just kind of game at a time, I think that's more what he emphasizes. But yes definitely given me advice.

COACH MOTZKO: Ryan's dad golfed at Minnesota. So we've got a lot of dads with connections.

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