

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Quinnipiac vs Minnesota

Friday, April 7, 2023

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Minnesota Gophers Coach Bob Motzko Bryce Brodzinski Logan Cooley

Finals Pregame Media Conference

Q. What's your relationship with their coach and why is it so hard to play against his teams?

COACH MOTZKO: We've known Rand a long time. How long has Rand been there? That's a long time. You're not even 29, I would take it. You were probably in grade school when we played in '13, is what I'm guessing.

Rand, he's got that program dialed in. They play a north/south game as fast as you can play it. They're stingy defensively, and he keeps doing it cycle after cycle after cycle. They had 33 wins this year. We're digging into what you have to do against them.

We obviously haven't played against Rand's team in a long time. And we'll put a game plan together for it.

Q. You hired Steve Miller for a reason. He's obviously legendary for winning and picking apart what opponents do or what you have to do to be successful. Have you seen him at all since your game ended yesterday? Has he looked up from his laptop?

COACH MOTZKO: You know him. So, no, he came over this morning. He just said, I'm out of here. And he gets his own room. He doesn't stay with his family. He's a machine. And you let him go. He's a computer. And he's working his tail off. And these guys know it.

I had one of the best when we lost Raboin last year. And Steve and I reunited after a lot of years apart from each other. But he's as good as they come in the business. He's also a good luck charm, so you had to hire him.

Q. Bob, I think I walked in as you started talking about Rand's defense and how they played the game. Seems



from Michigan, they didn't want to get into the dump-and-chase game. But you turned a lot of pucks over on him. Rand calls it a 1-1-3 defense. Do you have to dedicate yourself to maybe getting a little away from the game you're comfortable with?

COACH MOTZKO: What I thought was most impressive last night wasn't what you hear, 1-1-3. It was their forecheck. They dismantled Michigan in the offensive zone with aggressive play. I didn't even see the 1-1-3 last night, they played so fast.

That was what was impressive about that game last night. They were relentless on the forecheck. They played behind the Michigan defensemen. Two of the goals came from below the goal line. And they could have had more.

That game blew open late, but it could have blown open a few other times. They're right now a Big Ten killer. They blew away Ohio State. And Rand said this morning, yeah, we don't blow out many teams. I looked at him, what do you mean? That's all you're doing right now.

They have structure in their neutral zone. We've got to play fast. We've got to play as fast as they play and not let them set it up.

Q. Logan, what have you seen out of Quinnipiac from last night, and what impresses you from them?

LOGAN COOLEY: Obviously they're a super structured team. They're kind of a defense-first type of team. Obviously they have a really good goalie. And we'll have to get in front of him. Get in front of his eyes.

And it's going to be a game like a team like St. Cloud, Notre Dame -- you've got to get pucks behind them, and kind of set up our ground game. And we're going to be ready.

COACH MOTZKO: And we haven't gone over Quinnipiac yet with our players. So if you're going to ask a lot, that's coming this afternoon. They're going to go, ah-ah a little bit until -- the game got over late. I just wanted to put that in.



Q. Logan, can you tell us a little bit about the guy sitting to your right?

LOGAN COOLEY: Yeah, I mean, he's my favorite on the team. He's my roommate.

BRYCE BRODZINSKI: Trained him well.

LOGAN COOLEY: I think he's got the best shot in college hockey. His toe-drag release is one of the best out there. He's old (indiscernible). He's definitely been around in college hockey for a little bit. And he's a good buddy of mine.

BRYCE BRODZINSKI: Anything about Logan? Or if what he's saying is true? I mean, we're roommates on the road. So we've gotten to know each other pretty well over the season. He's kind of a guy that earlier in the year, you're kind of cautious of him because you didn't want to get him mad because he's such a competitive guy on the ice.

It took a little while to warm up to him. But once you warm up with him, he's always giggling in the locker room. Always smiling, having a good time. He's one of those guys you always want to be around.

Q. Bryce, how much do you lean on last year losing to Mankato to kind of push you towards tomorrow's game? And how do you put it on to the freshmen who obviously didn't get to experience that?

BRYCE BRODZINSKI: It's kind of everything. Our experience going into the tournament was our driving factor. All the older guys on the team that were in that situation before, we kind of knew if we didn't get on them early, last year we got shellshocked with how hard they played.

We know if we didn't get on teams early, that same situation might happen. So we weren't going to leave anything to doubt. And last year that was kind of our biggest regret, was that we didn't give ourselves the chance at the national championship. Now that we're in this situation, we're not going to hold anything back.

Q. Bryce, we talked about this a little bit, three of the four Brodzinski boys are playing in Florida, at least temporarily. But your dad said he thought Easton or Jonny would win one with the Huskies. And now it's kind of on your shoulders. How much pressure is that, and what have you heard from your brothers, about advice? Obviously Easton had the injury in Pittsburgh. But what have you gotten from them?

BRYCE BRODZINSKI: I don't know if my dad thought they

were going to win it -- I just think he wanted a St. Cloud Husky to win it. He's such a St. Cloud Husky fan. But he knows deep down the Gophers are the way.

All my brothers, they're not St. Cloud or Gopher fans, they're just fans of the game and they're fans of our family. So all of them are texting me, they're all wishing me luck. All my brothers are watching the games with their teammates because they're invested in it. And everyone in my family has been a great support this entire year.

Q. Coach, you weren't here in '14 when Minnesota lost to Union, but the comments at the time were about the age disparity was a common topic. Do you share that concern going into this game and lament that it's that way in college hockey?

COACH MOTZKO: I haven't done the age disparity. So I take it there is one? I haven't looked at it. But I know they have a bunch of grad -- we're all living that right now -- I know they have a bunch of grad players, transfer guys.

Honestly, I don't know. I mean, older guys, too, like last year at this time we had some people in the portal, obviously, contacting us. I went out, watched a few of our guys in the USHL. And when you like your players, and I liked the returning players, we didn't go to the portal because I liked our guys.

I bet on it. And here we are.

And the big key for us was our returning players that chose to come back and play for us. And I've said that Faber, LaCombe, Johnson -- guys that had reasons to leave. And Bryce comes back his senior year and we're paying that dividend.

We have enough older guys who have been through a lot of wars in college hockey. Then the young guys have been tremendous. They're good hockey players.

So it is what it is. They're an old, grizzled team that we're going to go up against. But we've had a challenging schedule all season long. I know from a computer ranking, it's awful high. We just gotta play our best hockey. We've got to be on our toes and play our best hockey tomorrow.

And if after that game, that's when we'll debate, who comes out on top. But we've got the right guys to go to war with. And we're fired up to get there.

Q. Logan, with one game to go in the season, just curious how you felt about your freshman college year not so much on the ice but off the ice. How do you enjoy being a college kid?

LOGAN COOLEY: It's so much fun. I think this team and this group we have, it's one of the most special groups I've ever been a part of. And it's so much fun to come to the rink every day and whether it's outside the rink, too, just hanging out with the guys. It's truly special and definitely a team I'll remember forever. Like I said, it's definitely a special group. I'm just happy to be a part of it.

Q. There's a lot of talk outside about Quinnipiac being an underdog. But they are the No. 2 team in the country. Do you guys have that perception, or is this just another team that you're going up against tomorrow?

BRYCE BRODZINSKI: Yeah, I mean, they're here for a reason. They're one of the best teams in the entire country. They've been proving that the entire year.

So it's not necessarily an underdog. We lost to some teams and they've lost to some teams. They've beat some unbelievable teams, we've beat some unbelievable teams. It's anybody's game. It's which team is going to want it more.

COACH MOTZKO: Which team doesn't make the mistakes tomorrow in one-and-done games. That's what we talk about. There's going to be enough plays out there for both teams to win it. But you've got to leave the plays in the locker room that can cost you -- discipline, turnovers. And that's the boring talk that you're going to get. But that's what it comes down to.

Q. Against St. Cloud State and BU, the first period was kind of a big thing in terms of dictating tempo. How much do you guys talk about doing just exactly that, dictating tempo?

BRYCE BRODZINSKI: I think the first period is the most important period of the game. If you can set the pace early and prove to yourself that you can play in those games, and if things aren't going your way you can look back and say what we were doing right in the first period that we were kind of all on top of these guys.

And it can kind of get rid of the frustration and the nerves early and put it on the other team and prove that you're there for a reason and you know you're not just going to be pushed around.

Q. It's clear, I think, to everybody just how you feel about the players. You've talked a lot about that this week and how you couldn't do to Justen by bringing in another goalie, betting on the team, talking about the D Corps. And I think it goes conversely. I was talking to

Brock in the locker room, said he doesn't want to just win for the teammates but wants to win for you as well. What does it mean to hear something like that?

COACH MOTZKO: It's not a job we have sometimes. You're part of these kids' lives and you truly care about them. You do. And we're playing for the championship. But if it would have ended a week ago, I would have been so sad not to be with this group again.

To think we're going down the last game and we're going to be together, this has been an incredible -- this doesn't happen in coaching. We have gone all year long with this group, and it's just been the steady, steady ride. We've not had a hiccup. And I attribute that to the leadership and the guys in our room. You always have dips in every season. We haven't had one. These guys have just been terrific. They work hard in practice. Today, we came out to skate. And the coaches looked at each other, my God, were we good today.

Like, we would jump, we didn't miss a pass. You feed off of that energy that they give you. And you truly care about them. You do. You truly care about your players. Sometimes you don't get to show them that all the time. Where they really learn it is years after.

Like, I played with his dad. So that's where a lot of the jokes come from. I've known his dad my whole life and I've coached three of the brothers. I get much closer with them after they're gone. And you're part of their lives. They start having kids and they come back. It's one of the great things in our sport. It's one reason I think we stay in it is they keep us young and they've sure helped me the last two years, I can tell you that.

Q. Logan, you've known Jimmy for a couple of years now. I know he was one of the reasons you wound up at the University of Minnesota. I sat down with him in June at a rink in the Twin Cities, just did a five-minute interview with him. I brought this up. In the five minutes, he said the words "win a national championship" three times. How much did you hear that from him as a friend and a line mate, and how much has that been a driving force in his season and what he's here for and what you're all here for?

LOGAN COOLEY: For sure. I think that just shows you what type of player and person he is. Obviously he's super competitive. He wants to win. And we all want to win, too. It's not just him. This is why you play the game. This is why you come to the school is to play in the big bright spotlights like this. And to win a national championship would mean everything to us, and it's something that we're looking forward to do. It's the reason we're here. And I'm

so confident in this group to do it.

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