

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Quinnipiac vs Minnesota

Saturday, April 8, 2023

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Quinnipiac Bobcats

Coach Rand Pecknold

Cristophe Tellier

Jacob Quillan

Zach Metsa

Finals Postgame Media Conference



JACOB QUILLAN: It's everything. It's assertive play. We take pride in being detailed in the dot. We're detailed in the dot. It helps out a lot.

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: Our guys are great. We've got Skyler up there. He's winning a lot of draws. Quills did a great job. Our four centers are just good at it. Everybody, it's a five-man faceoff, everybody digs in. Coach always emphasizes on that. I think we did a great job tonight and it helped us get the win.

Quinnipiac - 3, Minnesota - 2 (OT)

COACH PECKNOLD: First, I'd like to congratulate Minnesota on an amazing season. Coach Motzko, killer, they did an outstanding job, outstanding people, outstanding coaches. They had a great team.

In terms of winning tonight, it's awesome. It's awesome. I don't know if I can even talk up here. Just awesome. We're excited. So proud of these guys. Great group. Awesome to see all my alums in the stands. I can't even put it into words. I'm struggling. Usually I don't have trouble talking, but I'm struggling right now.

Q. Zach and Jacob, could you take us through that play? Looked like a set faceoff play. And how much do you work on that play?

ZACH METSA: It's a neutral zone faceoff play. You just attack the middle and Lipper made an unbelievable pass back to Quills. Crazy finish. I had a great view of it. It was awesome to watch.

JACOB QUILLAN: It's a set play, I guess. We work on it a little bit. Thankful it worked out.

Q. Did you work on it today?

JACOB QUILLAN: No.

Q. Speaking of faceoffs, you won almost 60 percent of them. How important is that during the game, when you're winning faceoffs six out of 10 times?

Q. How does it feel?

ZACH METSA: I don't know if it's even really sunk in yet. It's been a crazy journey. For it to be a goal at the beginning of the year and for to us come through -- one, I'm happy for all the alums and the guys that came before us that set the foundation that we were able to grow from. A bunch of them were in the stands today and reaching out and supporting us through this whole journey and they've been awesome.

And even the fans, we had amazing fans here. We had amazing fans in Bridgeport. So I'm happy for everyone, all the students back at Quinnipiac, all of our supporters. Couldn't do it without them. But it's a dream come true.

JACOB QUILLAN: It's unreal. I mean, we're such a close group of guys. Everyone is best friends on the team. I love every single one of these guys. We put our sweat and tears in every day, working at the rink. And we had a tough way to get to the final, but we battled every day. Feels unbelievable.

MODERATOR: Cristophe, that puck went in to win the game. What was going through your mind? Take us through it.

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: I don't really know, to be honest. Zach made a real good play. Went to the net, stick on the ice, and it went in.

But credit to this group of guys. We're family. And we got it done.

Q. Did you jump up and down?

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: I didn't really jump. I tried to stay calm. It was a great feeling.

Q. Jacob, you had a big jump in points this season and of course a really big Frozen Four and named Outstanding Player. What can you attribute that growth in your game to? What do you think went right for you, in particular, this season?

JACOB QUILLAN: During the summer, I stayed back at school and worked with Coach Brijesh all summer. I think that really paid off. A lot of good guys left last year like Bonjo and Oliver Chau. And I wanted to step up.

And also we got great players like Metsa and Telly and Lipkin and Graf. They're unbelievable to play with. Credit to them, too.

Q. What advice would you give to any younger viewers hoping to be in your shoes today?

ZACH METSA: Believe in yourself. Don't compare yourself to others. Everyone's got their own path, their own journey. Some guys bloom later than others.

Like for me, for instance, when I started at Quinnipiac I wasn't in the lineup. I was battling just to get ice time. And I was always raised right. I was always told just to keep my head down, keep working, stay in your lane. And that's what I did.

So my advice to younger players who want to be in this position is to just work in the dark, work in silence. You don't need to show it off on social media and all that. Just put in the work every day, be consistent with it and don't compare yourself to others. Everyone's on their own path.

Q. Your teammate, Collin Graf, just tied the single-season points record for the program. Could you talk about his impact this year?

ZACH METSA: He was unbelievable. He was our best player all year. Brought a dynamic element to our forward crew. And him, Quills and Lipper all year found a chemistry that was unbelievable and carried us a lot through the year.

And he's a special dude. He works at (indiscernible) off the ice and puts the time in everywhere he needs to. I'm happy for him. He was unbelievable this year.

Q. Cristophe, you get down 2-0. What started to turn the tide of that game? And obviously you have a big

goal there.

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: We were kind of nervous to start the game, to be honest. Pucks were just bouncing off our sticks. We just tried to calm it down, hold onto the pucks a little longer, establish the game plan, move our feet. And it worked out for us. It's unbelievable.

Q. Zach, you talk about just like being so happy for the alumni. What kind of impact have they had on you?

ZACH METSA: For me it started my freshman year with the senior class and the leadership that I had coming in that just set the tone for us freshmen that kind of whenever we strayed way, they brought us back, kept us on a tight leash.

But they were awesome. And they showed us way. And a lot of us, as we got older and became part of the leadership group, like, we were able to pass it down to the younger guys.

And then the other alumni that I didn't get the opportunity to play with, they've been reaching out left and right. They're asking what they can do. Like Devon talking to us and getting his advice.

And then, I mean, I can't even list all the other alumni. But I saw a bunch of them with tears in their eyes in the stands after the game.

It's unbelievable how deep Bobcat blood runs. And it means so much that we were able to bring this championship to them.

Q. What are your thoughts to the people back home who are watching? Is the party on or what?

ZACH METSA: We couldn't have done it without them. Their support in Bridgeport, all the home games, even here, we had an unbelievable crowd. They were awesome. But, yeah, they better be ready when we come back.

Q. What was the feeling in the third period when you were dominating in shots not able to get the equalizer, and then finally getting it?

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: I think we had them, to be honest. We were in the locker room. We were a confident group. And we kind of knew we had them, to be honest. We told each other we're a family. We kept working, and it worked out for us. We're just a family here. So happy we got it done, to be honest.

JACOB QUILLAN: After that tying goal, we had all the momentum in the room. We were staying confident. And we were taking that momentum right up to overtime, and it paid off.

Q. Jacob, talk about you guys took the timeout, obviously got the power play. What did you talk about in the timeout? And how quickly did you want to get the goalie out?

JACOB QUILLAN: I think Rand pulled the goalie 3:30. We wanted to execute our game plan, 6-on-4. We practice it a lot every week. And the boys executed. We got a puck to the net and jammed one in.

Q. Cristophe, can you just talk a little bit about your development during the course of the season, because as the year has went on, you've produced some big moments? Obviously tonight the biggest one with that first goal. But seems like it's been a building process for you.

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: I don't really know, to be honest. I'm happy -- I've worked hard all year with our training, with Coach Brijesh. The guys helped me a lot. And got great teammates. Everybody is supporting me. I'm just happy I could help. It's unbelievable. It's not about me; it's about the guys, for sure.

Q. There's so many family members of yours that have been around not only just immediate family members but extended friends. What does it mean to be able to see them after this? I know you haven't seen them, haven't really enjoyed the moment yet. But what does it mean to have that support now to go back to?

JACOB QUILLAN: I mean, my brother came to support me. He's my biggest fan. It was pretty emotional seeing him in the stands. There's a lot of other family that have support for me. The Heinke's mom, the Altmans. It's been great. There's support up and down the lineup for everyone.

CRISTOPHE TELLIER: I've got a lot of family here, my best buddy, my family. It's been great, to be honest. Everybody supporting our school, our family, our friends, alumni. We felt the support from everybody and it really helped us. It's unbelievable having them support us.

ZACH METSA: It means the world. I've got a lot of family here. My mom, my brother. Family that flew in from Colorado, Minnesota. So the Minnesota family were twisted on who to root for. But I mean their support means the world. You can't do without a good network around

you. And I'm very fortunate to have that.

Q. How concerned were you, down 2-0? And what changed, I guess? It did seem that you guys got a little momentum after their second goal?

COACH PECKNOLD: You're always concerned when you're down 2-0 against the No. 1 team in the nation. There was a lot. We struggled a little bit in the first. I thought Minnesota was great in the first. They were causing the struggles for us. And then pucks were hitting our sticks and bouncing. There just were -- we were getting bad bounces, too, as part of it.

But when we started getting a little life. I'd have to go back watch the tape and figure out where it was. Certainly the goal was huge, but I thought we had a little life before that.

Then we started to believe. And I thought our culture was, again, on full display in the third period. I mean, I don't know what the shots were. I don't know what they were.

But we wanted it. I can't tell you about the overtime goal because I still haven't really seen it because the kids jumped up because I think they thought it was going in.

I'm so proud of these guys. We talk a lot about culture and character. But there was a lot of belief in the third period. We were so positive. And we just felt like we were going to score. We were going to tie it and we were going to win this game.

Q. We may not be having this conversation if you don't take the timeout during the power play and pull the goalie. Ultimately it's your decision. Did one of your assistant coaches suggest it or even the players, or was this totally your call?

COACH PECKNOLD: No, it was my call. I almost did it earlier. As we all know, I like to pull the goalie. I just feel like you're going to wait a little bit, go 6-on-5. Why not do it 6-on-4? Especially with an O-zone draw, you probably need possession as we got. And we practice it.

And Graffer makes a great play. If you watch that goal, we score that goal because Sam Lipkin is doing exactly what he's told to do. He's hiding off the back post. And the goalie knows that. And he cheats the pass. And Graffer beats him with the five-holer.

Lipkin, I don't know if he got a point on it, but that Lipkin's goal. He did his job and it caused that confusion. And we've done it a lot, just power play where we go off that back door. Obviously we got a little fortunate, too, but they executed it.

We don't practice it every day but we do practice our 6-on-4. You have to be prepared. And they found a way.

Q. Question about the thoughts in your mind about your dad, your early hockey influence, a hockey icon, New Hampshire hockey hall of famer, Concord East and Olympics where you were the stick boy, played at Michigan State for a western school. And I am there were thoughts about him tonight with the moment.

COACH PECKNOLD: You're going to choke me up with that one. Sorry. Yeah, I miss him. Sorry. I can't answer it. (Chuckling).

That's OK, that's all right. I miss him. He's been gone a while.

Q. From where you started with this program, if somebody would have told you back then that 29 years from then you would be a Division I national champion with the same program, what would you have told them?

COACH PECKNOLD: It wasn't even a thought. It was a grind. I worked, my life was 12-hour increments. We practiced at midnight. I had a teaching job. I'd get home from school, my job, I'd sleep 3:00 to 6:00. I'd get up. I had to go recruit because we weren't very good. I didn't have enough players.

We practiced at midnight. I got home, slept 3:00 to 6:00 a.m. Then I got up. I was just survival mode. That wasn't -- we were D-III. We were a bad D-III team.

So you can't even believe where we were. Some of the guys were here tonight from that first team. It's incredible to do what we've done and be where we are. Just excited to get it done.

Q. You said earlier that you couldn't put a price on a national championship. Now that it's happened, could you put into words what the championship means?

COACH PECKNOLD: You can't put a value on it, what it means for me or our university. It's phenomenal.

Q. I know you've joked about it in the past, you talked about that '16 team and you don't play favorites. But you really love those guys. Has that opinion changed now that you have a national championship under your belt?

COACH PECKNOLD: As a dad and coach we can't play favorites. But I might be changing my mind.

No, I've been so lucky a long time. We just have great group after great group. Credit to my assistants and Mike Corbett. Before that it was Reid Cashman and Billy Riga, who's now head coach at Holy Cross; and Joe Dumais, who's now seventh year.

Probably the most important thing that happened for this national championship is Joe says no to Union head job and comes back. And Joe, he's a rock star. He's one of the best assistants in the game. Coach, recruiter. Just a great person. The guys love him.

He helps create our culture every day. The guys just love being around him. I can't give Joe enough credit for this. If I did it over again and really thought this through, I would have brought Joe up here and put him right up here next to me. He should be in here with us.

Q. Just going back to the building of this program, was there a point where you thought to yourself, okay, this is the culture and it's taking hold? Because obviously there's been discuss before now. This being the ultimate success.

COACH PECKNOLD: I mean, there's a lot of things. I had a lot of great kids in my early years, too. I just didn't have 26 of them every time in the locker room. I did, I had some great kids in my early years, D-III years, awesome kids. Just had a mix.

We had some good players, they weren't that committed, whatever. I always feel like that 2006 class, which was Ty Deinema and Mike Bordieri and John Kelly, Joe Dumais -- I should look up who all was in that class. But they changed everything for us. We kind of won the ECAC and they set the tone. We went from there.

There's a lot of important people, the Jones twins came in. Changed our practice habits, Connor and Kellen Jones. I wanted to get better in practice. I really felt we needed to be better in practice so kids would improve more, we'd have more pace to our game.

I really give Connor and Kellen a lot of credit. Matthew Peca came in the year after them. And Connor is playing in the NHL too.

Once I had those three, our practices have been awesome, awesome ever since. I thought it was on display tonight. We were in great shape. We were in great shape. We just kept coming the whole third period. And I thought we did the same thing against Michigan. I thought we were in better shape. That's why we want to practice hard every day.

Q. This is not only the first NCAA national championship in program history, it's the first one in school history at Quinnipiac. Can you describe what it feels like to bring home the first NCAA national championship home?

COACH PECKNOLD: It's awesome. I was trying to keep it together on the ice and not cry. Again, you can't put a value on it. You just can't. It's awesome.

Q. Did you see the governor before the game?

COACH PECKNOLD: Governor of Connecticut?

Q. He's here to watch your team.

COACH PECKNOLD: I didn't know that. Maybe I'll get a photo with him later.

Q. Nice present for your commissioner.

COACH PECKNOLD: Exactly. He's retiring. So it's great to do something for him. He's been in the ECAC forever, pretty much. He's been there a long time. Excited for him. Excited for him to move on to this next chapter of life. But it was awesome to have Steve here too.

Q. Your players didn't say too much about the play you ran from center ice there at the end. Who makes the freeze off play? Is it the centers, the players on the ice together? Did you call it? Was it something that was called, I guess? And how often do you practice those?

COACH PECKNOLD: We don't have a million, but we have faceoff plays on all nine dots. That one was Joe Dumais. It's his play. We have different responsibilities who is calling different things. But I gotta give Joe credit for that one.

Q. I'm going to steal a second one. When you walk into a recruit's house now and you show them that national championship ring, how much is that going to improve recruiting going into the future?

COACH PECKNOLD: It should help a lot. If you go back to our first Frozen Four run -- actually, you go back, once we built our rink -- which is phenomenal -- we moved up the food chain.

And then that '12-'13 season, we go to our first Frozen Four, we took a huge jump. We bypassed a lot of teams. Now we've kind of steadied a little bit. We're in a good spot.

We're not really up there with the big boys, getting the first-rounders, but this will certainly help. Something like this helps.

The season we had, 34 wins, and everything we've done, it's great. But in the end, we still need to find the right type of kid for our program.

We know why we win. We know what we're good. We know what we don't want. We cannot take a talented kid that doesn't have high character. It doesn't work at Quinnipiac.

Q. Could you put a experience in Tampa, obviously winning but...

COACH PECKNOLD: I've said it all. We should be here every four years. Every three years. I've been here now -- this year, '16 we were here, '12 I was on the committee. I think it's one of the best sites. I'd put it top three, probably, we have for the Frozen Four. We should try to get it here on a four-year rotation. I'd love to see the committee do that.

Q. What's been your favorite moment here in Tampa Bay besides winning the national championship?

COACH PECKNOLD: I was going to say winning the national championship. (Laughter) Geez, that's a great question. I guess my second favorite moment was beating Michigan the other night. That was pretty good.

Q. Besides beating Michigan, did you go out? Did you have a good dinner anywhere?

COACH PECKNOLD: This was a business trip.

Q. You still have to eat.

COACH PECKNOLD: Yes. Had a good dinner at American Social, attached to our hotel. It's been great. My daughters went out on the Bay Rocket, that ship, whatever. They did that today. It's an awesome place.

Listen, we didn't come here -- I told the guys, I went at them last Saturday, hard. We're not going to the pool. I think I said that in one of the media things. We've got to get the parents -- I think the big thing we did well as a coaching staff, we quieted the moist. Because the parents all want a piece of them. Girlfriends want a piece. The grandparents. We have some guys who have 30 people here. Guys, we've got to win hockey teams. You've got to tell them, no, I'm not going to meet you for lunch, I'm going to go take my pregame nap. We kept harping on that. I



did it again on Wednesday. I did it again today. I did it yesterday. Quiet the noise.

Q. It will change tonight, I imagine.

COACH PECKNOLD: I don't know what's going out there. We'll make the plane, the charter tomorrow at 10:30.

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