

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Denver vs Boston College

Friday, April 12, 2024

St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

Xcel Energy Center

Denver Pioneers

Coach David Carle

Jack Caruso

Peter LaJoy

Alex Weiermair

Finals Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll start off with an opening statement from you looking to tomorrow.

DAVID CARLE: Obvious exciting day tomorrow. Another great team that we have the opportunity to play. That can be great for college hockey fans. Certainly looking forward to the opportunity for our players and our program, all our fans and alumni and supporters.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start off by taking questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Peter, you're a Colorado guy. How much did you know about sort of the history of the program?

PETER LAJOY: So I grew up going to, like, my family, we had season tickets to all the games since I was like five years old. Been a big part of my life, growing up watching, seeing three national championships, since I'm five; '17 and '22. It's been pretty special.

Q. You beat Boston College 4-3 out there early in the season. What do you take away from that game?

ALEX WEIERMAIR: Well, they're a really good team. Obviously that Smith proline, they're really dangerous. I think the way we play, the dimensions to our game, I think we're going to be able to have a strong counter to them and really enforce our game on them.

I think we did a really good job early in the year sticking to that game. I have confidence that we're going to do that tomorrow, as well.



PETER LAJOY: Yeah, I mean, I think we just stick to our plan like we did in the beginning of the year, just out-muscle them, play physical. I think we can take it to them again.

Q. How beneficial was a day off for you today based on what you went through last night?

JACK CARUSO: Yeah, I think it was, like, really beneficial, but especially because we've had, two weekends ago, same thing in Springfield for our regional. I think it kind of gives a little bit to play off of, a lot to draw from as far as where we were two weeks ago, how we played out that day, what our preparation looked like from the day off, then going into tomorrow.

ALEX WEIERMAIR: Yeah, I mean, I think we did this, what, two weeks ago? So we are prepared for it. I think the day off is going to be really beneficial for a bunch of the guys and get them ready to go, firing on all cylinders tomorrow. It will be really good.

Q. Jack, the goaltenders obviously spend a lot of time together, get to know each other maybe better than other guys on the team. Tell us a little bit about what Matt Davis is like, what his personality is like on and off the ice?

JACK CARUSO: Yeah, I like to say he's a pretty normal goalie. He's easygoing, fun to be around. Obviously all the guys rally around him, love having him back there as our goalie.

I think as far as the goalies are concerned, it's like a quarterback room in football, a tight-knit room. Everybody supporting each other. It's been like that all year long.

We understand at this point, like, he's in a groove, he's doing his thing, he's been handling it really well. For us, we're doing anything we can to support and kind of have him be in a good space.

Q. Peter, first weekend in February you lost a game 7-2, gone through a couple tough weekends. Coach came out and said that we need to look at ourselves in



the mirror. What did you see as a team?

PETER LAJOY: I think we just, like, realized that we're better than this. You have a couple bad weekends, you can always bounce back like we can. We know our group, how we played. We just to figure it out and stuck to it.

Q. We've heard from some of the Eagles that this was a matchup they were looking forward to. When you hear that, do you think, game on?

PETER LAJOY: Yeah, I think we've been looking forward to it, too. We circled it on our calendar. Looking for them again. Knock the 1 seed off, take home the national championship.

JACK CARUSO: I would say similar to that. Through this journey, the road we've been on, it's been pretty fun every single team we've met along the way, it's kind of been another challenge, another challenge. For us it's just another challenge for us. I think for us, we're looking forward to it and we're embracing the fact that a lot of people have been talking about what a great group they have.

For us, we're just looking forward to that challenge of being able to beat them.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you. We'll continue with questions for coach now.

Q. I looked at your numbers in the last month, basically playoff time. Your goals-against are down significantly. How much was the commitment to team defense when you started the post-season? Is that something that you felt continually improved all season?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think so. We kind of gave the first half of the season a snapshot to the guys, where we were at. We've been the number one offense for the majority of the season. But I think at that time we were, like, 40th in goals-against per game. We just showed them data. I think the lowest goals-against per game was 10 or 11. I believe that was us in '22. Everybody else has been in the top five.

It's time to stop messing around with this. We need to get better at it. I think our guys have. I don't know what the exact numbers are, where we're at today, but it's certainly been excellent once we've hit the national tournament here and our level of desperation and urgency to defend and defend properly has been there. There's no doubt that's been a huge part of our success.

I don't think we had a win all year with scoring two or less goals. To have three straight games of two or less goals and to be 3-0 in them in the tournament I think goes to show the commitment that the players have, getting that leadership group, they've done a good job. Matty Davis' game has rounded into its best form, he's peaking at the right time, as well.

As we've talked all year, our defense is a team issue. There's been a high level of commitment to it the last two months.

Q. You haven't used the transfer portal a lot. I think just a couple guys in the last couple years. One of them scored the game-winning goal yesterday. With Tristan, why him and what was that process like?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think rewinding back to '22, even '21, we had a large senior class. We chose to bring Ryan Barrow back, then we had a real large and accomplished freshman class waiting to come. Those are all of our juniors now. Mazur was a part of that group, as well.

We obviously won in '22, and we felt like instead of bringing in a real large freshman class, tried to extend our window a little bit. Instead of having seven freshmen forwards, we brought in Dornbach and Broz. Why did we bring them in, specifically Tristan, he had a rough freshman year at Minnesota for a variety of reasons. He's a player that we really liked in Fargo, recruited a little bit when he chose the Gophers and felt like we had a connection with. Just thought change of scenery, an opportunity to add a veteran player in addition to Casey Dornbach to the lineup would be a really good thing for us.

Unfortunately, last year did not go as we had planned. This year we chose to bring in 11 freshmen, grow with them, similar to our '19 season, try and push the limit to see how high we could get our ceiling.

Our group's done an excellent job of reaching their potential. It's a little bit of the window into the decision-making process around Tristan and the portal for us.

Q. Can you detail Shai's development during his time at Denver?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think Shai, certainly is growing his 200-foot game, having a commitment to the defensive side of things, similar evolution to Mike Benning that he had. Came in, real good offensive player, great offensive mind and brain, but always, I would say after his freshman year, How do I play more, get more minutes? It's about not gaining my trust but his teammates' trust to play in big

situations, big moments, on the kill, up a goal in those last-minute type situations, playing against the other team's top six. Shai has made that commitment, again, to himself and his teammates that he wanted to be in those moments.

He's done a really nice job evolving his defensive game, his puck pressure, his ability to separate people in the corners, defend hard at the net front. There's only so many, like, power play quarterbacks in the NHL. There's 32. You've got to find a niche and a role in other ways. You have to be a 200-foot player, whether you're a forward or defenseman, to be able to carve out minutes at the next level.

I think Shai has learned in that, grown in that, accepted that, is really doing a nice job.

Q. You mentioned that Matt Davis is really peaking at the right time. What specifically is he doing well now that he wasn't even a month ago?

DAVID CARLE: His confidence and poise in reading plays. I think he's more patient, on his feet, more pucks are sticking to him. Just ability to track pucks into his body. That's what I see on the bench, just a calmness to him.

Q. Zeev obviously has had a tremendous freshman season for us. What does he do to enable himself to have that success at such a young age?

DAVID CARLE: I think it starts probably with his mindset. Very competitive person. Wants to be on the ice in big moments. Wants to impact the game. Has an ability to, like, play the game that's in front of him, which I think is really impressive. I mean, he can be a part of opening a game up, but he also can be a part of shutting plays down and play in the 2-1 games. He doesn't look uncomfortable, in our NCAA tournament games, he didn't look uncomfortable at the juniors not being on the power-play. To me it's hard to find a more impactful player. Shift in, shift out, game in, game out, that's available in the draft.

Q. Kind of in the theme of the last week, the chance for 10, one step closer to honor the legacy of this program. How special is that opportunity for you?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, it's why people come to Denver, they want to win championships. It's a lot of what we talk about in recruiting.

I was asked why our guys seem so comfortable in these moments. I think when we're recruiting players, we talk pretty openly about what our goals and aspirations are every year. I get that we're not the only program that does that, so it's not to say that, like, we're better than anyone

else for how we approach this.

We speak really openly and honestly about our desires to win championships, to be team first, to be selfless, and to have an opportunity to make history.

A lot of these players that are on our team were recruited with that mindset. There's only eight players on our team that were a part of the '22 championship team, so there's 19 guys that heard, You're coming here to try to win a 10th championship. Does that excite you? Yes. Then they come.

I think it creates a good vibe amongst the guys in what we're trying to accomplish for our school and our program and all of our great alumni and all the people that came before us.

Q. You've talked about 10. Your players are talking about number 10. Is there a fine line between getting a team focused on Boston College while also being mindful of what historically is at stake tomorrow night?

DAVID CARLE: For sure. I mean, we'll be very focused on Boston College. They have our full attention, so... They have had it for a while. We obviously played them earlier, we've seen what they done. They've really gone wire to wire as the No. 1 team in the country from December on, they haven't really looked back or taken their foot off the gas. Very impressive what they've done.

There's no doubt that as much as we want to talk about 10, we have to go out and execute at a very high level against a team, not just a bunch of individuals, a team that plays great together and has really been a dominant force since December on.

Q. A couple of great players up for the Hobey later this afternoon. You just played Macklin. What were your thoughts on him going into the game and what did you see from him at 17 years old?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, he's an excellent player. Had some looks. Matty made some saves. I thought we were pretty good with him off the rush. Pucks find him in the offensive zone really well. Got a really great future in front of him.

Q. I'm here to ask the tough questions. As the defense has improved, obviously the offensive numbers have also gone down. To some extent that's normal. Is there anything about the offense that maybe isn't clicking as well as it was before that you'd like to see? One game left.

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think we've gotten better defensively throughout the second half. We've been able to generally maintain our ability to put the puck in the back of the net, even without Rizzo and King in the lineup.

I do think that the goal scoring is more of an anomaly the last three games. Remembering who we're playing, these are the best teams in the country. I think we've all seen the tightness of the games, how many overtime games there were in the regional round. I saw a tweet that every champion has had to play an overtime game since 2017 on their way to the title.

This tournament, it's a really hard thing to get to this stage. It's hard to win. We're playing real good teams, good goalies. I mean, the two saves Kieran makes on Devine and Thompson last night. Our guy made big saves, too. That game could have been 4-3.

The goaltenders are dialed. Teams are more committed to playing defense now than at any other time of year. I think it's harder and harder just to generate offense.

Q. Way back when you were working on Gwoz's staff, did he give you encouragement that you could be good at doing this? Did he give you any warning to make sure you knew what you were getting into in this crazy business?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, I think he gave encouragement through opportunity, the trust and belief that he had in myself. George was great about that. He trusts people to do their jobs. Steve Miller ran the recruiting front. He never questioned Steve on players he wanted to bring to Denver, why he wanted to bring them. It was a full trust.

I think I was fortunate enough that he gave me that same level of trust and respect. Something that certainly I try and replicate with my staff. I think to answer the second part of your question, what I'm getting into, not really. I think probably saw that on April 1st, 2013 when he moved on and was let go. I think saw the realities of the business. I think you're seeing that more and more obviously at the NHL level. NHL coaches are fired at a much higher rate than the other three major sports. I think you're seeing more turnover with college hockey coaches as expectations and money pours into the sport at different rates than it has in the last 20 years.

I think we all know what we're signing up for, are very aware of the realities. Steve Miller did an article I think with the USHL a few weeks ago. I think he's bang on: college hockey changed on April 1st, 2013, when George was let go. The expectations and standards around winning really

took things front and center.

From that, obviously learned very quickly that none of us, we're all replaceable, none of us are invincible.

Q. Obviously you saw BC earlier. When you look statistically, seems they're extremely similar. Does it feel almost you're playing a mirror image of yourselves?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think that game back in October was probably the most exciting game that we've been a part of just back and forth. It was good defense, good offense, shots were 28, 27. We had some power plays in the third. They had two power plays. It was a back and forth affair. We had to come back in the third. The crowd was unbelievable. Sold-out forum. All the students were wearing black T-shirts. It was just great energy and emotion out of both teams.

So I would expect very similar here on Saturday night, with obviously much more on the line. Greg and I actually after the game, we both said, Hope to see you in St. Paul. Fortuitous that we both found our way here. I think it's the two best teams in the country. I think that's what everybody here wants. That's what the fans want. It's going to be a great hockey game tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

DAVID CARLE: Thank you.

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