

NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Denver vs Western Michigan

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

Denver Pioneers

David Carle

Carter King

Matt Davis

Zeev Buium

Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



year. We lost some players last year and brought in some really good young players this year.

I think we have a unique team in just having four forward lines that have a bit of a different identity to themselves, and I think playing off of each other, I think it's a really good dynamic that our team has. Defensively we move the puck well, and our details are spot on right now. So I think we're in a good spot coming.

Q. For David, as a coach, what do you feel you've personally learned in your Frozen Four experience, each one? Do you feel like there's been stuff you've been able to take away every time you come so that you apply it the next time?

DAVID CARLE: Generally as you experience things, you get more comfortable in them. Certainly feel more comfortable this year than the first one we came to back in 2016 in Tampa and in 2019 in Buffalo as a head coach for the first time.

I think the rhythm, the routine, how to manage the bye week, you know, all those things start to come into play as far as, like, ramping up at the right time to try and peak on Thursday.

We have a great support staff too. Matt Shaw helps a lot with that on the sports science side.

They're doing the right things for the guys' bodies and making sure they feel good because that's the most important thing come tomorrow afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: Anyone been to St. Louis before? First time? Are you going up to the Arch today?

ZEEV BUIUM: Been wanting to.

MATT DAVIS: How do you get up there?

THE MODERATOR: It's tight quarters. If you are claustrophobic, you don't want to go. It's worth it, if you get a chance.

THE MODERATOR: We have, of course, the Denver Pioneers, defending national champion. We will just start with familiar territory for the Pioneers. Coach Carle, opening thoughts on being here in St. Louis.

DAVID CARLE: First time in the city. Nice city. We had a nice dinner last night. Thanks for the hosting, the St. Louis Sports Commission.

Looking forward to competing tomorrow afternoon against a very good Western Michigan team. Very proud of our team for getting to this stage of the season. Hasn't been an easy year, but they've always taken a growth mindset and learned and grown all year long to get us here. Really proud of our effort that we've had last weekend out in Manchester, and proud of them for getting here.

THE MODERATOR: What was for dinner last night, boys?

ZEEV BUIUM: Surf and turf.

DAVID CARLE: Did you like the lobster? Lobster in St. Louis. I got it too. It was good. Six-ounce filet and some lobster tail.

THE MODERATOR: What do we have for questions? Anybody have any questions?

Q. Carter, third time here. Just what makes this group different? How does this group have a different feel than the ones you have been here with before?

CARTER KING: I think that's what's fun being at a program four years is you get to see the change every



Q. Matt, a lot has been made about your performances in the NCAA tournament and how it just seems like goals aren't going in when you are in there. What is your mindset like? How is it different, and how have you grown as a player over the championship experience as well?

MATT DAVIS: Yeah, I mean, I think the biggest thing for me is you just approach it like any other game. It's certainly a bigger stage, and a lot more pressure, but at the end of the day you are just trying to do whatever you're called upon to do and help out the guys however possible.

Really I just think I've grown in the experience department and just have a lot more confidence in these sort of situations, so yeah.

Q. David, obviously there's some interest locally about Jim Montgomery. What were some of the things that you learn from him when you guys worked together?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, a lot. First great hire by Doug Armstrong to not let him be on the market very long. Happy for Monty that they're in the playoff position now and the heater they've been on over the last five weeks. Happy for him and his family.

His wife is from here. A lot of connections here for him. Big fan. We still keep in close contact.

I learned a lot from him, from preparation, tactics, trying to connect the group, make sure everybody feels valued, team-first attitude. You know, a lot of different things from him that I think make him so successful wherever he's been as well.

Q. For Zeev, you guys obviously have a lot of history with Western this season. How much of the conversation this week has been about trying to get revenge and make up for what you guys did? What happened at the X in St. Paul a couple of weeks ago? How much have you talked about that, and just kind of wanting to get that bad taste out of your mouth from the last time you played them?

ZEEV BUIUM: I wouldn't really call it revenge or anything. We've obviously played them a couple of times in the regular season. They got us best of us in the NCHC. This is the biggest one right now.

We're excited for the opportunity to play them again. I think our team is ready. I think we're ready for this challenge, and obviously we've been here before. So I think we've prepared the right way, and we're just ready to play.

Q. For Carter: What do you make of the ups and downs that this team has had and how you've been able to overcome adversity, be it what happened in that final game in the NCHC game and just what do you make of how this team has been able to do that?

CARTER KING: Yeah, it's been the story of our year. We got off to a quick start, won 12 games in a row, and you are on top of the world thinking nothing is going to go wrong. Then as the usual progression goes, you hit bumps in the road, and especially playing in the conference we do, you're playing tough teams night in, night out.

For us it's just been every single game, win or loss, grow, get better to prepare ourselves for the tournament.

Nothing really changed with that loss. Like, it was more of just we've got to learn from our mistakes. We've got to make sure we keep the pedal to the metal when we're going into the third period there. I think it was a good experience for this team to go through. Especially going into these one-and-done games, you can't put anything to chance.

Q. I heard Coach talking about understanding the rhythm and how to manage the bye week. How do you guys as players manage the bye week? Because I'm sure you would have loved to have played last Tuesday if you could and just get it back out there. What's been the process like for you guys?

ZEEV BUIUM: Yeah, I mean, I think just rest and recovery, making sure you're feeling good, making sure the body is feeling good.

Obviously the regional games are aggressive, and that BC game especially was very aggressive and a lot of bumps. I think just getting back to what we do, sticking to our process obviously. You know, just recovering, like I said, and pushing ourselves in practice, each other, and preparing for what's to come.

So I think we've done it all, and we're just excited to play.

Q. I don't know if all three players could answer this one, but I know guys after they go back to the Frozen Four they mention how the games they remember the most, but also what they do, the dinners, the hang-outs in the lounge. I was wondering what was last night in the lounge like? Were you guys competing over it? Were you watching games? What was your favorite moment from last night? Just kicking back?

CARTER KING: I was running the ping pong table pretty

hard there. We had ping pong going on. I think there was some cornhole going on. We had a movie on as well.

ZEEV BUIUM: Kinger and I had some intense ping pong battles. He got the better of me.

THE MODERATOR: How much of the better?

ZEEV BUIUM: He won 2 out of 3, so I wasn't happy.

THE MODERATOR: Matt, do you have anything?

MATT DAVIS: I just kind of sat on a roller (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: Nothing wrong with that.

MATT DAVIS: I watched a bit of the battle. They're good players. I know my spot.

CARTER KING: Yeah, appreciate that.

THE MODERATOR: Was there a clear favorite going into it in your mind?

MATT DAVIS: I mean, Kinger is good at everything he does. He's probably an easy favorite, but Zeev's got a good backhand on him.

THE MODERATOR: We might be seeing a rematch later today, I'm guessing, potentially.

CARTER KING: Yeah.

Q. This is for Coach. Like Matt mentioned, there's a lot of interest locally about your relationship with Jim Montgomery and the job that he's been able to do here. You and him have both talked about how your relationship has grown over the years and you've kept in close contact. What does that look like from your point of view throughout the years? Is it more of a friendship, or has it been a friendship mixed with sharing coaching ideas and talking hockey a lot as well?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I mean, it's a little bit of both. You know, when Monty hired me, I was single. He had two kids. He added two kids while we were together. You know, he saw me meet my wife. He saw us have three kids now. Our lives have grown, as our relationship has grown as well.

There's a lot of friendship there, just connecting over our families and checking in on each other. Obviously he's been through some different things since he left DU, and I've leaned on him multiple times for advice as well.

It's a great friendship. He makes it out to Denver, obviously, to play the Avs. We always try to get together with a few other friends, and he's a great man, and couldn't be happier for him to be in St. Louis doing well.

Q. David, for you, you've got three great student-athletes sitting next to you, but I saw after practice there was a special award for one of the guys that won't be on the ice. Can you talk a little bit about the student-athlete in Boston Buckberger and the guys sitting next to you?

DAVID CARLE: I think our team GPA was 3.75. I know winter grades just got turned in. We had a lot of really good students in our room, a lot of great hockey players. I think a lot of the kids come to DU. Their families are very intrigued by the education that we have. Kids want to get a great degree, play in events like this, play in big games, and learn how to win, and also have a lot of fun doing it with a great social experience.

Obviously Boston dealt a really tough blow. Hard for all of us to see him have to go through what he's going through, and we would love for him to be in the battle with everybody, but you feel for him. He's got a smile on his face coming to the rink every day, and he's here for the guys. I know that they want to get the job done for him just as much as anyone else.

He does it obviously off the ice, 4.0, is no easy feat. A big contributor for us on the ice, was having a great season. We know that he'll come back stronger than ever for next year.

THE MODERATOR: Elite 90 Award. Does everyone know what that is, what Scott was referring to? It goes to the student-athlete of the four teams in the Frozen Four who has the top GPA among the four teams. Boston Buckberger, right? What a great name too, right? All-name team for sure. That was presented today at the end of Denver's practice.

Q. I know a lot of guys are asked about you guys in the press conferences and favorite memories. I wonder if you have a favorite behind-the-scene stories of Matt Davis having spent time with him the last few years?

ZEEV BUIUM: I don't know. There's a lot, but I don't know. It's been fun. I live with these two, so we have a lot of fun in our house. I mean, me, Marty, and Kinger -- mainly me and Marty, usually, roll the dice if we're going to hit Cold Stone or not.

I don't know. There are some things that I probably shouldn't say. Yeah, it's been fun living with them.

THE MODERATOR: Like what? We're just looking for examples (laughing). Who keeps the place clean?

ZEEV BUIUM: Both of them. I don't really step foot in the kitchen or anything like that. I'll take the trash out every once in a while, though. They taught me how to start a dishwasher, so that was embarrassing. We were two months in already.

THE MODERATOR: It's part of the college experience. Guys, we'll let you go. Thanks a lot. We'll continue on with questions for Coach Carle.

Q. David, I know your top focus this weekend is trying to beat Western and win a national championship, but recruiting never ends for coaches. We're kind of -- everyone else beside these four teams are in the heat of the transfer portal season right now. How do you guys balance trying to win another national championship and also keeping an eye on what's going on there and preparing for future seasons? How are you handling it this year? How have you handled it in past years?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, I think every year is a little different. You know, it's obviously dependent on what players are in the portal, if they're a fit, if they're not a fit, what we anticipate losing.

We really don't know that full picture until middle of next week probably at the earliest. So you try and put it on the back burner. Obviously I'll tell you, we start getting calls in February on people. So you're constantly -- the phone is always on. You're trying to evaluate things. There's obviously a lot of moving pieces right now between the CHL eligibility, the transfer portal. You know, there's more activity in the player market than there's ever been.

Our staff does a great job. Tavis MacMillan leading that charge for us on the recruiting side. I think in a perfect world our view on the transfer portal is it's an opportunity to try and enhance our roster.

We want to be in a position to want to use it. We don't want to be in a position where we need to use it. That's a really fragile balance that you're always trying to figure out, you know, when players are leaving, when they're coming. Is it the right player? Do they have the right timeline so you're not stuck. We brought in ten freshmen a year ago. You know, if that number goes much higher, it's hard probably not to go into the portal and need to do it.

So I think that's the biggest challenge today is trying to manage your classes, your roster so that you're not having to go because then you start to be at the whim of what's in the portal. Sometimes it's good, but sometimes it maybe is good, but not a fit -- they're not a fit for you or you're not a fit for them.

So it's really challenging. I think the most important thing we can do is continue to be plugged in, have a great recruiting list, continue to bring in freshmen, develop the people we have, and if there's an opportunity to enhance things, like we did last year with Pohlkamp and Salminen, then that's what we look to do.

Q. David, you mentioned it, the NCAA eligibility rules with the CHL. How do you get your arms around something this big, and how do you approach it knowing what it has the potential of doing?

DAVID CARLE: How do we approach it? It's like any rule. I have to be careful in what I say because we're part of the lawsuit.

So the rules are the rules. We don't make the rules. We have to play by the rules. We could like the transfer portal. We can not like it. Really not my opinion or I don't have much say in the matter. Same with the other rules that are in place. The NCAA decides them. A lot of it's litigated. Obviously we're seeing a lot of that happen in the courts, and things are changing very quickly in this landscape.

Our job is to be adaptable and to be ready to recruit the best players, the best team, the best people to the University of Denver that we can.

Have we recruited CHL players since the rule change? We have. A couple of them are signed. One is verbally committed for a year down the road.

So we're fortunate in Denver where a lot of our history is through the CHL, quite frankly, back before the rules changed. It's odd that we're mentioning the lawsuit because we were probably the ones who wanted to keep the rule open back in the '70s. Probably shouldn't have said that. My AD is in the room, but so far all good.

Anyway, Denver has a rich history in Western Canada, Western U.S. It exposes the player market to more players to college hockey. I think when we take off our Denver hats or whatever position we're in, we want college hockey to grow. If there's more players that are eligible to play, then I think that is a net positive.

Obviously we would like a few more teams. We think that the system can handle more teams with the player pool

now expanding, but it's our job to try and build teams and build it the best way possible. A lot of the things that I said with Matt is just trying to manage your roster, who is coming, who is going, so you don't have a ton of turnover year to year.

As it relates to the portal being open right now, you know, it's not so much is it bad for Denver, BU, or Western, or Penn State. It's more we've had players transfer after being in the Frozen Four, and it's all been amicable. We're helping them find a new place to play. They want more opportunities.

What I think what's challenging is you have four teams worth of players who might want to go into the portal, and spots are being taken up right now, and they're not going to go into the portal. This isn't basketball where guys are in the portal still playing in the tournament.

That's my concern about the timing of the portal. Some people say it's a disadvantage for these four teams. It's not quite the way I look at it. I think it's a disadvantage for some of the kids at this event who maybe want more opportunity or something different than what they have. I think that's what it's meant for, obviously.

Q. David, can you talk a little bit about the development of Eric Pohlkamp and what he's meant to your team, especially down the stretch?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, he's been great. It started in the summertime. He came in, got around his teammates right away. Really endeared himself to his teammates. Tried to engrain himself right away. In our experience that's been really helpful with the transfers that we have had is trying to get them here early, get them around our players so that they are showing buy-in, wanting to be two feet into what we have going on because it's hard coming in as a new person.

If you are a sophomore, junior, there are guys that have been in the program previous to you who have been doing everything they've been asked to do, and now a new guy comes in. So that can be an interesting dynamic, but Eric has done a great job, and Samu as well this year coming in and really earning their teammates' trust and respect.

I think it's played a big factor in the seasons they're having. Eric's game continues to grow and develop. Obviously everyone loves his shot, but I thought this past weekend his defensive ability, his stick detail, taking away time and space, all those things were excellent for us against Providence when we really ran five D the whole weekend without Buckberger in the line-up.

Q. I wonder if when you mentioned before that you have learned over the years how to manage the bye week, what maybe is something that you have learned, that maybe you can share of how you do things differently now than maybe you did a couple of years ago?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, that's a good question. I think it's really leaning in probably to the sport science side of things and Matt Shaw. He oversees our sport performance department, which includes our strength and conditioning, but also nutrition, rest. We use Catapult, which I know many teams do. It's not like we're reinventing this wheel here, but we lean into that as far as what the players need from a player load perspective during the bye week and making sure they're getting the proper rest, but they're getting the proper work as well. So that their bodies aren't getting shut off too much.

I think that's really important for them. I would say first time going through it, you're more shooting from the hip, and now there's a bit of a knowledge base behind it and a comfort level behind it. Matt is a great resource for our staff and for our players to make sure that we're doing what we need to do to feel as good as we can come Thursday.

Q. Just from an overall perspective, just the amount of NHL talent that's in this field right now, what does it say about college hockey and its ability to develop NHL-caliber players?

DAVID CARLE: Yeah, obviously we're -- I think it's a great path for players to come, whether that be, you know, one year, two years, three years, four years. Whatever really they need that's decided upon between them, their team, their NHL club, their agents. It's a great path to play against bigger, stronger, great coaching, great leagues, great teams all over the country. The player pool is only getting deeper, obviously, with the rule change, and I think it's only going to get better over the next number of years.

It's a great development path. I think you are seeing it more and more. NHL teams are trusting of the college programs. The amount of money and resources that is going into obviously all of athletics, but in college hockey, it feels like there's a bigger commitment than ever by many programs around the country to invest in the resources that help the kids develop.

It's a great model to play games on the weekends, to practice during the week, to get the lifts in. I think more and more people are getting their eyes open to that.

I think in that respect the game is in a really good place.

