

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Nebraska vs Vanderbilt

Friday, March 20, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

Nebraska Cornhuskers Coach Fred Hoiberg Pryce Sandfort Reink Mast Sam Hoiberg

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Nebraska student-athletes Sam Hoiberg, Pryce Sandfort, and Rienk Mast. We will open it up for questions.

Q. Sam, the conversation last night or yesterday was just about the quick turnaround coming off such an emotional high from that first win and then flipping the attention to getting ready for Vanderbilt. How has that process gone over the last few hours, and did you see good focus in practice today?

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, it's been good. It was definitely an emphasis to enjoy it. We earned that thing, and it's been a long time coming to get that tournament win. But enjoy it for a few hours, and then we got the film on them. That's when we switched to focusing on the next game.

Yeah, we locked in last night before dinner, watched some film, watched film this morning, and then just had a practice. So, yeah, we're definitely past the high and ready for the next one.

Q. Rienk, what about that film study of Vanderbilt jumps out at you? What are two or three things that made a big impression?

RIENK MAST: They're very fast. They have some very dynamic guards. Everybody on their team shoots, so they're very skilled and very well-coached. So it's going to be a good challenge.

Q. Sam, I guess I'm trying to think of a parallel with



Tyler Tanner. Maybe it's Fears, Thornton, Braden, a smaller, quick guard. What are you seeing with him as to how you're going to have to contain him?

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah, you said it. He's really fast. Probably as fast as anybody in the Big Ten. Definitely parallels to Braden, who we just played, and he carved us up. He has our full attention. He's insanely talented, and he's going to be a tall task for us. We have to have really good ball screen coverage and really good rotations to be able to stop them.

Q. Pryce, after watching the film, what jumped out about how you were able to get so many more open looks and shots maybe than what you were seeing in the Big Ten games down the stretch?

PRYCE SANDFORT: (Off microphone) we got out in transition, had breaks. My guys were finding me (off microphone). When all that's clicking and we're doing what we're supposed to on the defensive end, it makes it a lot easier to get those looks on the offensive end.

Q. Sam, the locals here are still buzzing about that crowd yesterday and comparing it to Oklahoma City Thunder playoff crowds. How do you come down off of that emotional high and get ready for tomorrow? Do you kind of expect the crowd will be at that fever pitch tomorrow?

SAM HOIBERG: Yeah. I mean, I think it's going to be maybe even louder, because people are going to be off work and come down for the weekend. Yeah, we fully expect to have another amazing crowd, but you can't rely on that to win a game. You have to still execute and focus on the game plan.

It's such a quick turnaround, and they do so many good things that we're going to have to be keyed on. We're really locked in on putting in the game plan and executing that, and then we have to put a product on the floor to where they're going to be able to bring that atmosphere.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll dismiss our student-athletes. We'll start with a statement from Coach and then open it up for questions.



FRED HOIBERG: Thank you. It's an honor to be able to continue competing with our group, and we're going against a really, really tough, well-coached team tomorrow, very dynamic in their back court. Tanner and Miles are unbelievably quick with the basketball. Both shoot it at a high level. Nickel is just a flat-out laser, and their bigs all play their roles to perfection with their ability to pop and knock down shots and play with great physicality as well.

Played another top-10 offensive team and a very disciplined defensive team as well. So Mark has done a terrific job with his group. Both of us got off to pretty similar starts. I think they were 16-0 before their first loss, and it's a team that is playing with great rhythm right now.

You look at their game against Florida in the SEC tournament a week ago, and you know, beat them by 20-plus. That tells you all you need to know about this team, and I was really impressed with their performance yesterday as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. When you are coaching a team that starts 20-0, now that you've been through it, how does that change expectations, internal and external? How does that affect the fact that you're not facing adversity until later in the year, similar to what Vandy did?

FRED HOIBERG: I don't really think it affected anything. It certainly didn't affect our approach. I knew pretty early on in the process, and I have talked a lot about the key week to me was the Creighton week where we played them and had two days of preparation to play Wisconsin, which is which was our first Big Ten game.

You have to get over the emotions of beating your rival very quickly. We had two days to prepare for that Wisconsin team. Took care of business at home. Then we got over that one quickly as well and moved on to our first true road game, which was Illinois. Arguably our best win of the season, certainly our best road win.

That showed me that our guys were able to move on to the next assignment, which obviously this time of the year, if you are fortunate enough to advance, you have to get over it quickly or you're going to get stung, and you're going to get sent home.

Our guys have done a good job. We had a film session last night with Vandy. Had a first look. Talked a lot about their personnel, and just finished an hour and a half on the court putting in our game plan. We get an opportunity with the later start tomorrow to get one more time on the floor

with the shoot-around. I think at 1:00 is when our time slot is. We have to take advantage of that.

We'll have more film tonight, which Vandy is I'm sure doing the same thing with their preparation for us, but we really have to be on point with this. Again, if we're not ready to go, it's not going to be pretty out there. They're that good. They're that talented.

Again, our guys, I guess to answer your question, have answered the bell after really big emotional wins and also after tough losses. This one was emotional for all of us yesterday, you know, finally getting that first win in the tournament in the history of the program.

I'll say this, our guys were locked in in the film session last night. Were they excited? Should they have been excited? Absolutely. I told them enjoy it, enjoy this ride that we're going through right now.

It's been a special team. They've developed unbelievable chemistry and just to see the joy in their faces and to be able to share it with the crowd and share it with Kent. That was awesome when our guys went over and all rallied around Kent.

I saw him last night. He still kind of had that look in his eye. It's been fun, but again, our guys have gotten over it. We're ready to move on to the next one.

Q. What do you think, looking back on the Troy game, led to such an uptick in your defensive activity, forcing the turnovers is. And then on the other side taking such better care of the basketball with only six turnovers?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, listen, give Troy credit for the way they came out of the gate. They were hitting shots, but at the same time, they were tough shots. We just said stick with it, stick with the plan, keep contesting.

Let's have more activity with our hands, create deflections. That's what I was really impressed with our guys. I looked at Sam has been great all year with his deflections. Cale has been great all year. Burke has been great all year.

When I saw Rienk last night, he had six deflections in that game. Those were huge for us. I thought Rienk had control of that thing last night as well with seven assists and just how comfortable he looked and our flow. We were 1.39 points per possession before that game went analytically final. That was our fourth best offensive performance of the season.

Offensive rebounds was a key in that game. We were 2.33

points per possession on offensive rebounds. That's huge to be able to get those and not forcing it inside over length. We're going to have to do a good job of that tomorrow with the way Vanderbilt plays, but we were spraying it out and got it to the right guys. I thought our attention to detail in the game plan was exactly where it needed to be. I talked about our focus. It was where we need it.

Again, with today, with our film session tonight, our shoot-around tomorrow, we're going to have to have it again. When you have a one-day prep like this, you know, your focus has to be extra. We've done that to this point.

Q. I know the personnel has changed, but I'm thinking about the culture, the staff. Obviously your son was there. What last year was like in that three-week period waiting to play in the crown, don't make the Big Ten Tournament, all this is going on, and you guys are back in Lincoln practicing, not knowing what you're going to do in Vegas. Just what was that period like, and how much do you think it has overall carried over?

FRED HOIBERG: That was a very important couple of weeks for our team. I give Bryce Williams a lot of credit. He's the one who talked to the team and said, guys, we're playing in this thing, and we're all going to do it. You had players opting out at that time. I think us and Boise were the two teams playing in that event that kept our teams intact.

The biggest thing to me out of that tournament -- obviously you win it; you cut down the nets; that stuff is awesome. The way that Cale Jacobsen played in those last couple of weeks was so important for his future.

He was as important as anybody on the court for us in that four-game championship run that we made in that tournament.

Listen, there's a lot of questions going into it. Media makes different remarks about what are they doing, what's this event? It was a really cool event. It was unbelievably well-run. FOX did an incredible job with that event. Accommodations first class, the meals, the venues that you play in. I'm telling you, the teams that are playing in this year are going to be impressed with it.

It is going to help them going into the offseason. It did us. At the time they changed the rules, thankfully, because we had to go into the portal, and we got four players signed by Zoom when we were out playing in that event.

It was great for us. It gave us some momentum going into it after a very disappointing finish where we lost five in a row to finish off the season. That was great for us for

multiple reasons.

Again, you don't get a chance to cut down nets very often, so for us it was a really cool and special event. Again, the guys that got the opportunity to play that are helping us this year in a huge way, that was as important as anything.

Q. You're moving on to Vanderbilt, but last night was pretty special with the first win. Give us an idea how many people you heard from and who were some of the more notable people that maybe reached out to you with a call or a text to congratulate you guys on the win?

FRED HOIBERG: You know, the really cool thing to me -- obviously I heard from all of my family, and a lot of them are here, but hearing from my family. I think the thing that was really special is all the former players that I heard from Ty Lue to Rich King to Beau Reid, down the line. Players that played for me with Bryce, you know, sent me a really nice message. A lot of the former players that played for us.

To hear back from them -- listen, there was countless others. That's the thing. We had an all-time attendance set with our alumni weekend. There was a record number of players that came back for that. Henry T. Buchanan who has been unbelievable since day one with his support of our program, and Bernard Day, I could go on and on. I won't bore you with all that. The former players I thought that was really cool to hear from, former coaches. Tim Miles, Doc Sadler that texted me that were the heads of this program.

It was cool. I wasn't able to get back to everybody. I will. We obviously got a lot ahead of us, and I talked to the players about keeping our walls up are but we all do. We got a big assignment ahead on a short amount of time to prepare. We'll get back to all that, but yeah, to hear from them and boosters, people that have helped us in this crazy time that we're living in right now. It's fun.

People that said, listen, I haven't cried over a sporting event maybe in my life until you guys won that game, so that meant a lot to a lot of people. It was great to hear from them and share this experience with them.

Q. What's been this team's super power? Is it the ability to move on to the next thing after a win or a loss, or is it the connectivity or something else?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I don't know if it's a super power, Mike. This team has been very connected. I will say that I've talked about this team a lot, about how limited our distractions have been this year, being on time for morning

practices. I think one time we had a player that overslept. He got there 15 minutes late for a film session.

No off-court distractions. Third straight semester with over a 3.0 GPA. All those things matter in my opinion. The way that they built off the court chemistry I think has translated and helped us on the court.

They've just done all the little things really well, and to me it makes our job as coaches a lot easier when you have a group that does all those things, they hold each other accountable, have got great leadership with this group as every, as good as any that I've coached.

Even yesterday in the huddle there was one huddle, and these are long time-outs, man. You're sitting there it seems like for five minutes. I just let the players talk for one of those time-outs. I said very little when I got in there, and those guys were talking and trying to create solutions for what was going on the floor. I love that stuff, man.

I can't remember who it was came up and said, Coach, what do you think about this play? I said, hell yeah, run it, let's do it. We did it, and we scored on it. They see it, the players on the court. I've had some really good coaches. Kevin McHale was that way. Larry Bird was that way. If you played for him and you had a play, they just let you go with it.

Our guys, some of them have the ability to do that.

Q. Fred, the reaction to this team has been unbelievable. The reaction yesterday obviously was off the charts. You've gotten a lot of national attention this season. What does a win in the tournament going to do for this program? What are the possibilities?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, that's great question, Tom. When I saw our players going around chanting "Go Big Red" with the fans, I thought that was really, really cool. I talked about this last night after the game. That environment, I'd never seen anything like that ever. It's going to be like that, I think, again tomorrow night.

It's fun to be able to share an experience like this when you have a first like we did that's that important. We don't have to hear that narrative anymore about Nebraska basketball being the only power school to never win one of these games. That's great.

What it does to help us moving forward, I don't know. We live in a weird world right now with NIL and all those different things, and the portal, that we deal with, but it doesn't hurt.

I think the system and the style that we play, if you're a skilled big, it's a great system for you. It's a great -- if you can shoot the basketball, you see what Pryce is doing in our system this year, and Braden, and multi-skilled players. Yeah, I mean, when everything opens up and we try to reconstruct the roster, we'll talk a lot about this. We'll have edits and be able to show potential recruits on what it looks like if they come here.

Yeah, can it help? Sure, it can.

Q. The Oklahoma City mayor yesterday posted a picture of himself with the Lincoln mayor and joked that she had brought the entire population of Lincoln with her. Do you expect that kind of crowd tomorrow? How does a crowd like that at a site like this that's neutral give you an advantage?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, we've had a couple of these this year. The game up at the Pentagon against Oklahoma was very similar to this in a much smaller venue, but I saw here and the I saw it in the NBA in this arena. This is one of the great arenas in the league just how loud it gets. Oklahoma City Thunder fans are as good as any, maybe the best, in the entire NBA just with how vocal they are. It's more of a college atmosphere with how they are here.

So I've seen it in the building. I never thought that it would be like that in a neutral site NCAA Tournament game with how it was. Will it be the same tomorrow? I think there's going to be more Huskers here. Whether they'll all be in the building, I don't know, but I think they're going to take over.

I saw one guy jumped in the canal last night. Yeah, they took over. It's almost like they didn't want the day to end, you know? That was fun to see all that stuff, although I'm guessing he got in a little bit of trouble for doing that.

Q. Fred, you mentioned last night that you were looking forward to talking with your dad, and you hoped that he had seen the game. Have you had a chance to catch up with him, and kind of what was that conversation?

FRED HOIBERG: I did, yeah. I got a chance to talk to my dad. My mom, who is here, called him and got him on the phone in the home that he's staying in now.

Yeah, he said he was able to watch most of the game is what he said. Yeah, it was a special conversation. I won't say exactly what we talked about, but he's really proud of everything. When I look back with the press conference when he was there and how different things are for him now, yeah, it was emotional talking to my dad.

He's been there -- listen, you sacrifice so much as parents for your kids, and my dad did as much as anybody to help me get to where I got in this game as a player and certainly been there as a coach.

He's the guy out in the parking lot yelling at a ref for missing a call after the game. Yeah, it was a special moment for me.

Q. Pryce Sandfort, he's had to deal with tough man-to-man defense all season long, but he still set records for three pointers for you guys. He still did what he did yesterday. How much better has he gotten at defending or working around, I guess defending, hitting threes still?

FRED HOIBERG: He's just in constant movement and motion. Obviously we've run a lot of things through him. He and Rienk have developed a really good chemistry. Our guys have figured out different actions to run based on where he is when we're coming down in transition, but he's just scored in so many ways. We've used him on the post as the year has gone on. We've put him in pick and roll situations.

Yeah, he's handling contact a lot better right now as well, and he's understanding when he's in the bonus, when to draw that contact as well to get to the free-throw line.

Yeah, with the way he was being not allowed with the freedom of movement, you know, he's figuring out different little things to be able to free himself up. We've run him off different actions and at different angles for him coming off screens, and I think that's helped him.

Q. I just wanted to follow up. You mentioned talking to your dad, but also, as a dad with your sons here and winning that first game, what does that mean to you as a dad to experience that with them?

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I mean, listen, the twins, they're as fiery a competitors as certainly anybody I've ever seen, to the point where when I was on the road -- I'll never forget this -- and I many wife called me crying because the twins had gotten in a fight with each other. They were on the same team. Sam took a shot Charlie didn't like, and he went over and punched him and they squared up. They were five years old. That's just how they were growing up.

To see Charlie in his first year in the program and have such a positive impact on Sam. I've said this a lot, he can get in Sam's head a heck of a lot better than I can just with the whole twin telepathy thing, and he's able to be there for him and really be as supportive as anybody that he's going

to ever be around.

To be able to share that moment with these guys, you get so caught up in the coaching part of it that you really don't think about it, but when that game was over and all the emotions were flooding out, to be able to share that with those two guys has been great.

Sam hopefully will play this game for a lot of years. Then he's smart. He wants to get into the broadcasting part of it. Where Charlie maybe not so smart, wants to coach. I've tried to talk my kids out of it. I've got two of them now. Jack with the Spurs and Charlie wanting to get into it now in the infancy stages of his career.

It's their passion. I'm going to help them as much as I can to help them get in a good spot, but to be able to share that moment with those guys was pretty awesome.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports