

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

## Nebraska Cornhuskers

## Fred Hoiberg

## Bryce Williams

## Keisei Tominaga

### Postgame Press Conference

Nebraska - 93, Indiana - 66

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Nebraska head coach Fred Hoiberg, along with Keisei Tominaga and Bryce Williams.

FRED HOIBERG: I was really, really pleased with our effort. I thought pretty much start to finish we were locked in, gave them a few too many offensive rebounds in that first half, fouled the three-point shooter twice in the first half.

But I just loved how we finished. I think it was a 17-0 run we ended the first half on. I thought Bryce got us off to a really good start. They were trying to go under on some ball screens. Bryce stepped up with confidence. Knocked some shots down.

Hit a few turnovers early. But once we cleaned that up and started making simple plays, we opened it up a little bit. I was really pleased how our guys found Keisei with the little heater he had there in the last ten minutes of the first half. Then we found a little formula. They were a little sluggish in the second. But we didn't want to duplicate what happened in Bloomington where they cut a 20-point halftime lead all the way down to three in about nine minutes.

Good job by our guys coming out and extending the lead a little bit. Again, everybody that stepped on the floor made a contribution. That's what it's all about.

**Q. Hey, Bryce, you hit two threes right out of the gate. Keisei got going on that heater in the first half. At what point did you guys know it was going to be one of those nights where the shots were falling and the**



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**offense was really hitting a groove?**

BRYCE WILLIAMS: It's kind of taking what the defense gives you. Both of us are pretty good shooters, I'd like to think. If they want to go under us and disrespect us, then we have to shoot it. Tonight we were making those shots, and we felt confident, and that gave us an early boost.

**Q. Bryce, just from your perspective, when Keisei is feeling it like that, what does that look like for you? How are you trying to get him the ball there?**

BRYCE WILLIAMS: Easily. I just want to find some way to get him in the action because he can shoot it from anywhere. It's not that hard to get him in action. Whenever Keisei hits one shot, it's find Keisei the next play. That's the goal, and that's what we're going to keep going to.

**Q. Keisei, what was that moment like just the end of the half, to kind of put an exclamation point and finish it with that made three-point there?**

KEISEI TOMINAGA: It was a good feeling. I didn't think I'm going to do a step-back three, but I saw they switch on me, and I think that was -- I don't know. That was a good feeling.

FRED HOIBERG: I drew up a great play. (Laughter).

**Q. Bryce, the shooting and this offense is going to get a lot of attention, but defensively how proud were you guys of your effort, especially inside on their bigs?**

BRYCE WILLIAMS: That's the focus. That's the focus every time we play Indiana. Every night, just to be the best defensive team we can be.

They got us a few times, but we limited them, especially with what they wanted to do was play through the two bigs. We got Reneau and cleaned up on the glass.

They got too many 50-50 balls, but at the end of the night, we came out on top, and that's all that matters.

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**Q. Fred, you're in the semifinals of the Big Ten tournament. Women made it to the finals. What do you tell all the Nebraska basketball fans that these programs are for real?**

FRED HOIBERG: Our fans were unbelievable tonight. I was really happy, and I thought our guys did a good job getting the crowd into the game. I even saw a guy with a Michigan State sweatshirt going crazy after Keisei hit three in a row.

It was a fun game out there, and we got it going like that. But our crowd really got us going and energized us. We went on a little bit of a run. I thought it got really loud.

Yeah, our women, we talked about them, and they really inspired us to show that you can do this in this format. I think, if I'm not mistaken, this is the first time Nebraska has ever been in the semifinal in the Big Ten tournament.

So pretty cool. It's hard to beat a team three times, and Indiana is playing really good basketball right now with five consecutive wins. We just went out there early. Even though we gave them, you know, kind of trading baskets early in the game, once we started getting stops, I think held them under 30 percent in the first half. That's really when we extended our league.

**Q. Fred, trying to front their bigs can be a real challenge, but it seemed like your guys did a good job of cutting off lanes and being bodied up to it. Did that work out better than you thought it might?**

FRED HOIBERG: They did. They exposed us the first couple games at times. They just threw it right over the top of us. When we did go in the double-team, I thought our physicality and our hands were really good. It wasn't a direct line pass. It was a looping pass that we got our hands on.

That was the real key. Those guys are two of the best in the league, as good a front line as there is in the Big Ten. I felt that everybody that had an opportunity really battled in there. We started digging out some rebounds. Again, we gave them too many early, but once we started finishing off possessions, that's really what fueled our run because we were able to get out in transition.

**Q. Fred, you talked about, going into this, just the stage of the conference tournament. A lot of these guys and how they're going to handle entering postseason. I'm sure you couldn't have been much happier with how pretty much everybody put on the floor played under that spotlight.**

FRED HOIBERG: I thought we played with great confidence, that's what I really liked. This game is always tough, you've got butterflies, especially with the late game. We sat around the hotel all day long. We tried to get activities. We had a nine a.m. shootaround. We were getting ready to go to the game, I told my staff, hell, it feels like that shootaround was two days ago.

Once the guys got out there, I told them, the lights are a little brighter, the arena is a little bigger than what we've been playing in. Just go and do the same things that made us a really good basketball the last six weeks of the season. That's what we are going to have to continue to do.

We're playing a helluva team tomorrow in Illinois, who gives you matchups problems all over the floor. And when you play this late game and you've got to bounce back and play at 2:30, it's hard. It's really, really hard.

We're going to get our guys out of here tonight and let them sleep. I'll send them a first look. Illinois, we've only played them one time this year. Really have to have a good mental day of prep heading into this one, but that's what this time of year is all about. You've got to get ready, move on to the next one, and hopefully go out and play inspired basketball again.

**Q. Fred, at halftime, 17 straight points, Keisei is doing his thing. What was the message at halftime? What was the halftime locker room like? Because I'm sure it was pretty loud.**

FRED HOIBERG: The message was, you remember what happened in Bloomington. We were up 20. We were up 23 today at three points. We knew they were capable. We knew they'd come out and heat us up a little bit, which they did. Once we started getting our movement back, they did a really good job. We started playing a two-man game with Rienk and Bryce. And then I thought we cut really well off of that to build the lead up.

I think it got up to 17 or 18 at one point, but we built that lead up to 30 again. Just really pleased how we got back to our movement. We did the things that made us successful in that first half.

**Q. Fred, first, any comment on Trev Alberts' departure. And your thoughts on Devin's?**

FRED HOIBERG: I was wondering when someone was going to ask me that question. We've got a job to do now. I wish Trev the best in his new journey, Trev and Angie. I'm confident that the leadership will find a really good replacement that will do a great job leading the athletic

department.

I'm all in on this place. I love it. I want to be here. Hopefully we can continue to have success, have sustained success at Nebraska. There's no doubt that we can do it with the fan support, with the facilities that we have. This is a place that is really special, and it's going to attract a really good leader for our athletic department.

Again, I wish Trev the best, but we've got a job to do right now. We're focused. You could see that today with our guys, and it's got to continue. Hopefully we come out and play well again tomorrow. We're going to have to against a really good basketball team.

**Q. Fred, Indiana has obviously got a lot of length and physicality. Just how do you think you handled that, especially down low in the paint?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, they really do, and they put you in a tough position. Are you going to double them? Are you going to play one-on-one in the post? You've got to spray out to the shooters.

I thought Gunn was phenomenal off the bench. And Mgbako got them off to a really good start. Those guys can really shoot the ball. Cupps and Leal made big plays for this team last night. It's a talented team that's playing really good basketball.

Galloway for me is one of the best players in the league. When you've got to replace that with somebody, they've got to step up. I thought Gunn did a good job of that coming off the bench tonight.

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Indiana University. Head coach Mike Woodson, along with Xavier Johnson and Mackenzie Mgbako.

MIKE WOODSON: I'll keep it brief. Just want to congratulate Fred and his team. They played extremely well. We just didn't have any answers tonight from a defensive standpoint because we were just not real good tonight. They were very good tonight offensively as well as defensively.

**Q. Xavier, it was just 33-27 with three minutes to go in the first half, and they went on that crazy run. What happened there? And when it starts to snowball like that, what, if anything, could you guys have done to change that?**

XAVIER JOHNSON: They just started making -- knocking down threes. We started losing defensively. Tominaga started getting hot, and it was call it a day from there.

**Q. Xavier, it was a tough year for you. Obviously you weren't able to play very much. It seemed like through the Big Ten season the team was fighting something like that, whether it was your injury or somebody else's. How difficult was it to try to fight through and get to this point in the season? How much of a challenge was it?**

XAVIER JOHNSON: I wouldn't say it was difficult getting to this point. I would say it was difficult just getting back into the rhythm of the game. I've been knocked out of rhythm so many times this year. I'm a rhythm type of player, and I've got a long way to get to my next



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destination, to get everything back.

I've got time, and I'm going to put in the work to get to where I need to get to.

**Q. Mackenzie, just as much as you can in the immediate aftermath of a loss, just how do you evaluate your journey this season, the improvements you've made maybe at both ends of the floor, the way your role has changed and grown? Basically your journey from November until now.**

MACKENZIE MGBAKO: It was just keeping my head down, playing defense, and locking in on what Coach really had to say on offense and defense and being susceptible to the changes being made while the game was going on and just being a player of the game.

**Q. Mackenzie, you guys have been playing really well through this last little stretch here, last five-game winning streak and stuff. Did this outcome today kind of come as a surprise to you?**

MACKENZIE MGBAKO: Yes. I had all hopes we were going to win this game. It hurts that we lost.

**Q. Mike, as far as the season is concerned, when you have -- I know you haven't had much chance to think about it, but when you look back on what you didn't have and what you're hoping to have next year, what assessment do you give to that and what you find in recruiting?**

MIKE WOODSON: Again, it's too early right now to even entertain that question. The bottom line is we've got to get better. From a talent standpoint, this summer will be spent watching a lot of film on players because we're going to lose some players, I'm sure, and we're going to have to build around the core guys that are coming back.

We've just got a lot of work to do this summer to get better. I don't want to sit here this time next year and not be playing in the tournament.

**Q. They did a lot of fronting on the bigs tonight, and it**



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**was difficult for you guys to get anything going inside with your guys, which is kind of an important part of this season. What was the difficulty mostly there in trying to get anything going offensively with the bigs?**

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I just -- I don't think we executed. We did a poor job in executing offensively. I mean, Malik and Ware have seen double teams all year from the back side, from the top side, from what we call the soft spot up top to the ball. They've been double-teaming all ways you can double-team, but they didn't read well tonight.

They didn't read the back side, and we were forcing things early to the point where we just didn't make the right play.

I thought our intentions were great when we came out because it was back and forth, but when it got to 33 to 26, 27, we dropped the rope, and they went in big at halftime and we just never recovered.

**Q. Mike, the inside-outside offensive philosophy, what more from this year's group do you feel like you needed to make that work?**

MIKE WOODSON: Again, for the most part, it did work. We didn't make enough shots. I thought coming down the homestretch these last five games, we shot the three ball extremely well, but early on and midway, we just -- we struggled to shoot the three ball. And then we struggled to make free throws.

We kind of put it all together the last five games prior to coming into this game, and we pretty much looked like a team. We made threes. We made our free throws. The ball was moving, and we got a lot of assists. So a lot of good things was happening in that five-game stretch.

But we met a team tonight that was really good and well coached, and we had nothing for them.

**Q. Mike, I know you don't want to think too big picture right now, but the portal has always been, since you've come into the job, a consideration. How have your conversations maybe in the postseason through the immediate aftermath of the season evolved with your guys? When you sit down to talk to them about the season that was, what's coming next, where they are looking forward, where you are looking forward, how has that process evolved for you over the last three years?**

MIKE WOODSON: Again, we've been -- we always meet every day, guys. We spend a lot of time, the coaches and I, together, and we talk about the what-ifs because you just

don't know based on the new system and the portal, you know, who's going to be on your team, who's not. Who are we going to entertain once the portal opens up?

So I mean, it's going to come very quickly, and we've got to be in position to do our homework and our due diligence on these players based on who we might want to come in to fill a spot to help us move forward next season.

**Q. Mike, obviously your relationship with Xavier Johnson has been one that you've talked a lot about. He's been with you for three years now. He played probably the last of his college career tonight. When you reflect upon his career and kind of your relationship as a whole, what do you remember fondly about him?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, we had a good run. I look at the last two years with him, and even last year, him not playing as much for us, he's just always been there in spirit, and he's worked his butt, every time he got hurt, to get back out on the floor to compete. He's a competitor.

I just feel for him because he just wasn't able to fulfill his dream in terms of really completing his college career as a basketball player because he was hurt so much.

But life goes on. He's got to now think about his next journey in his life, and I just hope I'm a part of that. If he needs anything, I'm going to be there for him to help him navigate whatever direction he decides to go because that's just who I am as a coach. I need to be there for him because he was there for me when he was on the floor.

**Q. Mike, you've talked through the course of this year about some things that have disappointed you about this season, but a dozen double-digit losses and many that were 20 points or more. Some of those blowout losses like that, is that something that might be the most frustrating part of this season for you, just not being competitive in some of these big games?**

MIKE WOODSON: Every loss is frustrating because you go in the game with the game plan and you try to get your team to play at a high level. I know when they do, we're a pretty good basketball team, and we're very competitive. Tonight they were a step ahead of everything that we wanted to do, and you've got to give them credit. We've just got a lot of work to do this summer to get back and get our team back on top.

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