

NORTHEASTERN HEAD COACH GREG CRONIN QUOTES

Could you start off with some comments about your matchup with UMass Lowell and talk a little about your exciting quarterfinal series with UMass?

“Firstly, we played UMass Lowell a couple of weeks ago. We had a two-game series, and I think we know their team pretty well, and I’m sure they know us pretty well. I thought Lowell could have easily won the game Saturday; I thought they outplayed us. I think a lot of their team is driven from their D, I think they’ve got really good defensemen – they all move the puck well, they all skate well, they’re physical every time they play, they put a lot of forechecking pressure on us both nights. It should be a really fast-paced game, I’m expecting it to be a terrific Hockey game on Friday.”

“The UMass series was an incredible series. Obviously it went three games plus an overtime, and I think Tootie would agree with me the first night was a very structured game. I think both teams were trying to execute a game plan that reflected a lot of defensive awareness, there weren’t a lot of great scoring chances. The next night kind of took an identity where there was a lot of chances going back both ways and we were fortunate to come out of that one, I think it was three or four to one. And then Sunday night’s game, I thought we played really well, I really liked the way we were playing in the first two periods. And anytime you play three in three, and a couple of people asked me about that, you’re always concerned about the decisions you make because fatigue can be a factor, and sometimes those decisions you make, if they’re poor ones, can end up resulting in goals in both directions. So I thought we did a really good job with our decision-making. Anybody that was in the building saw it was a tremendous environment and for them to tie the game with thirty seconds to go was a numbing feeling and then we were very lucky to regroup between the third and overtime and come out with the win with nine minutes to go.”

Could you talk about your team’s mental toughness? You lose the regular season crown on the last weekend of the regular season, which is tough, and then, like you said, in that game three against UMass, you give up the tying goal with a couple of seconds left, just the ability to bounce back from disappointments like that.

“Well the first part of your question, about the regular season title slipping away, I mean, I have to give a tremendous amount of credit to BU. To go on the run they went on, I think they hadn’t lost a league game in 13 or 16 games, and the fact that we were still in first place at the end of the year was amazing in itself. The fact that their team was able to go on the streak they went on is a probably once-in-a-decade type of experience. We did everything we could, and we kind of lived by that motto, we just control what we can control, and we try to maximize every game. If somebody was to ask me before that stretch we played after the Beanpot – I think we went with UMass, then we had BU, BU, Lowell, Lowell, and BC, BC – if somebody was to say the final six games we’d go 3-1-2, would you be happy with that, I probably would have taken it and still felt we might have won the league given what the point situation was. But BU kept winning and they deserve the championship and it’s a great achievement for them. The UMass game, you know, I hear all these stats about the team that loses the first game, how many times they don’t win the series, or the team that loses the first home game, you know this kind of stuff coming through the e-mail that I didn’t even want to open up. The reason why I bring that up is because our guys don’t really look at that stuff. I think we just try to control what we can control each day. I thought that the Friday night game was a tough loss because we were leading one to nothing, and there was a lot of edge in the building, but I think they came back with a renewed energy, and a renewed spirit. You used the word mental toughness, I think we do have a mentally tough group. These are the same seniors that went through a three-win campaign back in their freshman year, so I think the stinger of that is still there. It’s an easy reminder of how fleeting success can be.”

How about in terms of making it back to the Garden, obviously this is a big accomplishment for where you want the program to go, can you just talk about the huge thing for the program to get back there to the final four of Hockey East and how special that is for you.

“Yeah, and here’s the other thing for you, somebody told me after the game on Sunday night that it’s the first time Northeastern has been back to the Garden in fifteen years and I didn’t even know that, I was really surprised to hear that. Saying that, it kind of adds a little bit more excitement to our game Friday night that we’re actually back there after a fifteen year absence. I think it’s great for the program: obviously the visibility is what you’re really trying to create, not only for your players, but also for your alumni, and I’m really happy for the whole school. I think the Northeastern community has really been rejuvenated throughout this whole season, and I think to be able to enjoy that – you know, the Beanpot obviously is a special event, but to be able to enjoy that again this year and have an event like the Hockey East final four at the Garden for the Northeastern community is real special.”

Coach, how about the play of your seniors and maybe just their leadership off the ice. I know we had talked earlier in the year about [senior captain Joe] Vitale not having the best year statistically, but obviously he contributes in other areas of the game. So if you could just talk about the senior class, and what they’ve gone through to get to this point.

“Well obviously when you’ve got six guys who have been through that rebuilding process of the program, they’ve been responsible for moving the win column up every year. They’re a very determined group. I think they’re very mature, they’re determined, and they’re very composed as well – they never really get too rattled. It’s kind of a unique group: they’re not real vocal. Some leaders are real vocal and they get a reputation of being real spirited leaders. There’s not one of that group - between Rassey, Liotti, Chisholm, McCauley, Vitale, and Ginand - there’s not one of those guys who’s really loud or vocal, it’s just they have a calm belief in themselves, and quite frankly we’re the only team in the country that didn’t lose back-to-back games and I think the reason behind that is because of that stability, and that poise that these guys play with every game.”

Could you talk about Tuckerman, who scored the overtime winner, what you hear, and what his progression has been like this season?

“He’s a talented player. He’s probably the most talented guy on our team. One of my defensemen, Denis Chisholm, he’s been around four years, when there’s been some pretty good players here -- Mike Morris, who if he wasn’t injured could have been an NHL’er, I’m not sure what his status is now -- and Denis played against all these players that have been here in four years and Denis says [Tuckerman] is the most difficult payer to play against in practice because of his speed, his strength on the puck, and his skill. That kind of gives you an idea of what his talent base is. His ability to play with that talent every night in a visible way is up to him, and he’s kind of been in and out at times this year. From my perspective there was a visible change in his behavior right before we played in the playoffs against UMass, you could tell that he had lit up a little bit. And you know, one of the things that happens in college sports is that your freshmen try to juggle academics with Hockey and social responsibilities, and sometimes they lose focus, and they get sometimes discouraged – you don’t see it on the ice because you’re coaching them and that’s where they want to play well - but it does effect them. I think all of our freshmen have gone through bouts of that, but I think they’re all on the same page right now, and clearly Alex was the best freshman on the ice for us over the weekend.”

Two teams going into the garden with a senior class that's never been there. Obviously your team's been there in the Beanpot, and do you think that's any advantage for your team going into the Garden, the fact that your seniors have at least played in this building four times?

"They've played in it eight times, right? Yeah, six times up until this year. I think it gives some familiarity to the building. The other thing I thought about, not to divert the question, but I don't know how many people are going to be in the building at five o'clock. It's one of those games like the Beanpot first game – it's really quiet, then starts to fill up at the midway mark. I think that'll be the biggest challenge for both of us, the anticipation of playing in the Garden – recently when we played there, we had the late game, but the place was packed. There's a different energy in the building when it's crowded, and I think the fact that there won't be as a lot of people in there will make it an interesting psychological preparation, just because there's 17-plus thousand seats in there, but there's only a couple thousand people at the start of the game – that's a little bit of a challenge. And I think because of that challenge I don't think there will be much of an advantage."