

2024 NCAA Women's Lacrosse Championship

Friday, May 24, 2024
Cary, North Carolina, USA
WakeMed Soccer Park

Northwestern Wildcats Coach Kelly Amonte Hiller Samantha Smith Madison Taylor Media Conference



Northwestern 15, Florida 11

THE MODERATOR: We welcome the Northwestern Wildcats to the stage represented by Coach Kelly Amonte Hiller and student-athletes Madison Taylor and Samantha Smith.

With their win today Northwestern advances to their 10th National Championship game in program history and second consecutive. We'll start with opening statement from coach and then proceed to questions.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I'm just really, really proud of our team. I don't think it was a perfect game. Just tremendous kudos to Florida. What a team. So many weapons and so much fight, so well-coached. I have a lot of respect for them.

I think when we went into the break with the rain delay, I think it was on the minds of the players several years ago when we had the rain delay against UNC. I think they stayed very calm in the situation. They didn't want to exert too much energy because it was such a battle already. Then revved up at the appropriate time, but just really proud of the way that they came out really fearless out of that break and were able to close the game out for us.

Just can't say enough how grateful we are to be in a championship game on Sunday. We don't take that lightly, and it's a pretty cool thing. We're very, very excited to go back to the hotel, rest a little bit, and probably watch this game on TV.

Q. After Maddie picked up that green card, you exchanged some words and patted her on the back. Do you remember what that conversation was about,

and how did you see her go from that moment and to score five goals today?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Was it a green or a yellow? Was it? I thought it was a yellow.

I just said, Don't worry about it. I think that sometimes in games like this where the intensity is so high you're going to have situations happen, and that's why it's a team. If it wasn't a team, it would be costly because you're in an individual sport, but this is a team sport. That's the beauty of lacrosse.

Maddie was able to just shake it off and think about the -- start thinking about the next play while she got that one-minute rest.

Q. What did you as a coaching staff focus on telling them and getting them ready for that?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I think honestly from the beginning our messaging was stay calm, just rest, do everything to have your body ready when the time is right.

Then our rep, Bonnie, was telling us that it was going to be closer and that it was imminent. Then we talked a little bit of strategy both from the offensive side, the draw side, and the defensive side. Then in the last probably ten minutes before we went out the girls started to get revved up and excited.

Q. Coach, I want to go back to before the game, film study. Two things that I noticed on the field that I wanted to ask you if you had picked up on beforehand. It seemed like the Florida goalie was beating stick side high maybe three, four times when the stick was being dipped. Is that something that you saw pregame that you could plan for? And, also, when Madison was isolated on the wings and scored those two pretty important goals in the first half, was that something that you planned?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: You know, I don't coach the offense as much. My husband, Scott, does. I think just as a general rule he doesn't try to delve too much into the



specifics of where players should shoot. I think that he really tries to leave it up to the players to have the freedom to do their thing.

You know, we have shot well all season long, so it's just really being able to identify the situation and then put it around that goalie. I think it was more of that than telling them specifics where they might get tight.

Q. Sam, this is your third straight NCAA Tournament game with a very commanding performance in the draw circle. You are facing one of the nation's top draw takers in Harrison. What do you see on tape that allowed you to have such a great day?

SAMANTHA SMITH: I think that we as a draw team we pride ourselves on prepping extremely well. I think that when watching her, we noticed she uses a lot of her strength, and that's where she -- what she relies on a lot, so I think my speed and my quickness helped me today, yeah.

Q. Can you talk about the difference between defending versus attacking for a repeat? I think earlier this week I saw something Northwestern produced, and I don't know if that's maybe something you have experienced over the years that helps in those repeat attempts.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, I think we have a philosophy where we want to go out there and play fearless no matter what. I think that especially in a semifinal game I talk to them a little bit about it.

Sometimes when you win the previous year, you can kind of think you're in the Finals already, but I think playing such an amazing team in Florida really snapped us out of that because we saw all week long watching film and in our prep we really didn't -- I didn't know a lot about them. I hadn't watched them quite a bit, so I had to do like a lot of prep. I felt like they were as dangerous as any team we've seen. Really, really dangerous.

So, you know, just kind of talking to the group about that, just recognizing we're not entitled to be in the championship game, and we have to work for it. I'm just really proud the girls did that today.

Q. Coach, how do you think your history with Florida from the ALC and the battles that you all had back then, how do you think that impacted your prep and your team coming into this game?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Well, I think there's some similarity, but there's a lot of differences too. A lot of

differences in their staffing. So they were doing things a lot different.

I would say one similarity to some of the Florida teams that we've played in the past is just the incredible amount of people that were threats on the offensive end, and I believe the last time that they made the Final Four it was very similar. They had an unreal team.

You know, I think that we knew we had to be really dialed defensively. We knew we had to be dialed on the draw because Harrison is so strong and let the offense kind of do the work. They do the work each game, and that was kind of our mentality going in.

Q. Maddie, what was going through your mind today? (Off microphone)

MADISON TAYLOR: I think we were just working really well together. (Off microphone)

I think that in the beginning we weren't really playing that much for each other, and I think we talked it out that we need to move more, play for each other, play selflessly, and I think we did that, and everything started clicking for us.

Q. Maddie, you mentioned when you guys had just three assists and (indiscernible). How much do you think all that motion helped you guys break down Florida's isolation?

MADISON TAYLOR: They plan man-to-man. We knew that coming into it, so we knew we had to move a lot. We knew we had to set those picks through all of that, so we practiced it all week. I think we just came in prepared.

We didn't start the way we wanted to, but we definitely finished the way we wanted to, so...

Q. Kelly, you guys aren't really used to this type of near 90 degree weather. Was there some adjustment that needed to be made or some getting used to because of the weather?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I think for us we have to play as hard as we can to play another day. You can't really hold anything back. I think defensively we were able to kind of go a little bit into a couple of different looks that we had and then offensively have some longer possessions. We don't tend to be like that just in general with our mentality, but I think due to the heat, every draw control was kind of gold. Just being able to possess a little bit.

Then I felt like -- I don't know how the players felt, but I felt



like after the break it cooled down significantly, and I don't even know if it rained outside, but it felt a little bit cooler and more manageable than it did earlier.

Q. So last year you said you don't take transfers willy-nilly. This year you had Lindsey Frank (indiscernible). She ended up being one of your top scorers. What enticed you to take her and when did you start seeing her impact?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Well, I started seeing her impact in the fall on the field hockey field. Just, honestly, she visited, and we had a shared visit with field hockey and us. It was just -- I just really felt like she would be a great fit for our team with her personality.

I think it is a bit of a challenge to come in mid-year and find your niche, and I think with each game that's gone by she's getting better and better and better, like a fine wine, I guess.

So we're hoping she can continue that. Her last game was great. Tonight was great. Any time all the attention is on Erin and Izzy and Maddie, our people are going to have opportunities. Dylan and Mary and whoever, Lindsey.

So I think that has just got to be a mentality. That's something we talked about at the break too. We have to have everyone step up and be willing to step up.

Q. Maddie, this being your second trip to back-to-back title games, what are some of the biggest improvements you've seen in your game as a player and as a leader?

MADISON TAYLOR: I think when you're a freshman you're nervous and things can be running high. I think this year I'm a lot more relaxed, and I think having a lot more fun. I think that was a big thing we talked about today, especially in the rain delay. We were, just, like, We need to celebrate more. I think after the rain delay we really did that. Just celebrating all the little things and having so much fun with this group.

Q. (Off microphone). How is that experience going to help you prepare to go back to it on Sunday?

MADISON TAYLOR: Yeah, I obviously that helps, but I think that we're not going to put any expectations on ourselves. We're just going to go out and play, have a lot of fun with this group. It's not going to be the same, yeah.

SAMANTHA SMITH: I agree with Maddie. I think it's important that we just go out there and realize this is our last time ever playing with this team and just have as much

fun as we can. No expectations, no pressure. Just loving it and having a great time, yeah.

Q. Coach, what does it mean to you to have your former coach and former mentor here supporting you, and also, you coached against your former assistant coach in your freshman year at Maryland.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: It's pretty amazing. I think everything comes from Cindy. I was recruited by Cindy and Mandy. That's the reason why I went to Maryland. They changed my. Forever indebted to them.

Acacia was coached by Cindy. She worked for me. Then we also were coached by Gary Gait, who coached Kayla Treanor, who worked with Cindy. So it all comes back to Cindy.

She's done so much for this sport, and just to see her here up in the stands just so much passion. She had a heck of a team this year. I just really feel great that I still have a great relationship with her and support.

Q. We saw Molly adjusting something. What was the issue?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I think she got a cut, and there was a bloody sock. Maybe something like Curt Schilling. We were laughing about that on the sideline, but she just had a cut that was bleeding pretty badly and needed some attention.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports