

2022 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Saturday, May 28, 2022

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Rentschler Field

Cornell Big Red Connor Buczek John Piatelli Chayse Ierlan

Media Conference



kind of the message is yeah, we stopped, but we're going to go again at some point. Let's be ready to go when we do.

CHAYSE IERLAN: Much the same as John was saying. A lot of the guys in the room we've been waiting to play for the last two years and a few more hours wasn't going to hurt. Having that experience with Ohio State and another similar type delay, I think it was more the same old and just enjoy the moment, and a few extra hours definitely wasn't going to kill you.

Cornell 17, Rutgers 10

CONNOR BUCZEK: So proud of this group. I can't express in words the progress that they've made throughout the course of this year and what they've dealt with over the last couple years. The leadership of this team is as strong as any I've been around, and again, I don't know if we're the most talented team in the country, but certainly these guys worked as hard as anybody. So, so proud of the effort, the resiliency, their continuous ability to manage situations, today having a three-hour rain delay in the middle of it and coming back and fighting, picking up right where we left off. Just such a vote to the leadership of this group and the ability of this group to manage adversity, take it in stride and go get the next play.

Really excited for the opportunity to play on Monday and know it's been a long time since this program has had one, so we're excited to be here.

Q. John and Chayse, how did you handle the three-and-a-half-hour delay? What did you do? How did you kind of approach it? How did you deal with it?

JOHN PIATELLI: I think Coach had a good message for us. Basically it was just we've stopped and go'd throughout our careers. Two and a half years for me of playing, and then getting stopped in 2020 and then not having a season in 2021 and going again in 2022. It's been a lot of stopping and going, so we're used to it.

Had a little experience in Ohio State in the first round where we had a lightning delay, as well. We've dealt with it, and it's just the ability to get on the field and play is always a blessing and a privilege, so when you get out there just got to give it everything you've got, so that was

Q. It just seemed like you guys were sharper throughout that first half. Second half, too, for that matter but the first half in particular. Did you feel that way that you guys were pretty much on point from the start, and did you feel like there were some things to exploit from them right from the start, whether it was in the clearing game or whether it was on pick plays and stuff like that?

JOHN PIATELLI: I mean, the whole mentality this year has just been game to one. Let's get that first goal. In this game we didn't, but you just turn the page and get the next goal. That was the message the whole game and it's been for most of the season. Just one play at a time, make that play and then make the next one.

It wasn't really we got these guys after first quarter, second quarter. It's just let's make the next play, let's keep going, let's build on it. But really you've got to clean the slate, one play at a time, especially with that lightning delay. We tried to just wipe the first half. It was a whole new game, basically like playing a second game. So it was just clean the slate, get the next one.

CHAYSE IERLAN: Yeah, I agree. Just a lot of complementary lacrosse out there. Offense get a goal and then our defense would get a stop and we built off each other and built a good lead, and then like Johnny said again, just coming out of the delay, more of the same, just game to one mentality and that first GB was big and just kind of built from there.

Q. I want to ask you about both because he's from



Connecticut, but can you speak to Harrison Bardwell's role on the team and what he's done to help you get here?

JOHN PIATELLI: Yeah, Bardy is awesome, one of my best friends since day one. He's a workhorse, a stallion. He can go for days. He can run the field like crazy for days. He's really one of the guys that's the heartbeat of the team. He's just always willing to get on the field and fight, and he's a great D-middie and makes a lot of plays out there, and sometimes it goes unnoticed because he doesn't really play a glamorous position where he's getting goals or assists or anything like that, but he's getting ground balls, he's playing a lot of shifts defensively, and he's a great player and he's a big reason why we're in the position we are.

CHAYSE IERLAN: Yeah, for me being back there, he's just a calming presence, really a veteran guy, a fifth-year senior, and he's one of the most athletic kids out there, so it's just nice having him, whether it's in the clearing game or men down or anything like that. He's just a good outlet for me personally and I know for the other guys on the defense. If we're struggling clearing, he's a good guy to get the ball to and get it upfield.

Q. Two similar questions. Can you speak to Gavin Adler's performance, and can you speak to Michael Long's riding goals and how they impacted the flow of the game?

CHAYSE IERLAN: Yeah, I'll start first with Gavo and Mike. I guess first Mikey, when we turned the ball over, go in, makes a save, anything like that, we really believe in the whole team playing defense. It starts right with our attack, and those are huge momentum goals that the ball doesn't even have to come down to our end to get a stop. Mikey had some good ones, CJ had a couple knock-down balls. Johnny is in there, too. I think that's awesome when our attack are playing great defense for us up front.

Then for Gavin on the defensive end, one of my best friends, and just a truly just warrior really, warrior teammate. Just obviously he's got all the talent in the world, but it's more helping coach and mentor some of the other guys out there because he really sees the game like no other, and it's just awesome to have him out there, especially in my position. It's nice to have him in front of me. So yeah.

JOHN PIATELLI: I think that answered it well.

Q. John, when you scored your last of the day, did you realize that that tied the record, and how does it feel to be up there with a name like Mike French?

JOHN PIATELLI: No, I had no idea I tied it. I really didn't know I was close. But I actually came off the sidelines and one of my friends on the team mentioned that, and I smiled. Obviously it's a cool thing, especially I didn't realize I tied Mike French, who's been -- obviously he's a Cornell great and he's been a big role model for me. He reaches out all the time, and he's an alumni you can go to for honestly anything, whether it be trying to get a job, speaking lacrosse, whatever it may be. He's been a really good influence on me and a role model.

It's pretty cool tying him. It's not really about that. As it goes here at Cornell, it's about the team and just being able to play in the last game of the year.

Q. What does it mean especially after missing 2021 to be here this weekend and now to be playing in a National Championship game?

CHAYSE IERLAN: Yeah, well, I've still got hopefully a fifth year left, so we'll see how that one goes. No, I mean, it's just an awesome feeling. This is what we dreamt about after 2020 was canceled and the year off in 2021.

You envision it, and that's what you work to. You come to Cornell to play in these type of games, and just extremely grateful and proud of all the work that we did when no one was watching. We believed in ourselves, and one more game left, and go out there and put a good game together.

JOHN PIATELLI: Yeah, the only thing I would emphasize is just we've got two more days together. I think that was the message for the whole Playoffs was just let's fight to spend more time together because it was taken from us in previous years, so we know how special it is to be together, so let's just keep fighting to stay together, so that was the message, and it's awesome to get two more days.

Q. What does it mean to you to be the first Division I lacrosse coach to bring a team to a National Championship as the youngest coach?

CONNOR BUCZEK: I honestly -- it's a cool honor, but it's so far from me that is making this thing go. There's 60 guys between the 50 on our roster, five on our immediate staff, the five on our support staff that really make this place what it is, and Cornell is a special place. We're surrounded by special people.

A place that means so much to me. It's really cool to be on the stage, to have the success that we have and represent the university in the fashion that we have.

Q. Connor, what do you attribute the -- what was the



most substantial factor in the outcome, and was there a moment obviously given the unique nature of the way the game unfolded, but was there a moment where it felt like the game turned in your favor permanently?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Realistically going in, we knew that they do a great job pushing transition intelligently. I don't think they run-and-gun at the level that you would maybe assume with the NASCAR title, but certainly they take advantage of subbing mistakes and they do a great job in the middle of the field and they cause havoc and they've got defensive personnel that handles the ball well.

For us, it was stopping that transition. It was not giving them that life where when they get running, they get running, and then they did it to win in the quarterfinals and they do a fantastic job of it. That was kind of first and foremost was we had to win tough ground balls in the middle of the field to earn possession and to stop that run, and we had to transition back well defensively.

I thought the guys did a fantastic job of that across the board, and really I thought the turning point in the game, and again, there was multiple -- just feeling like it was two separate games, but in a lot of ways it was Mike's ride-backs there. Those ride-back goals and kind of flipping the script and having some transition goals and some success there, felt like that gave us a lot of juice, and that's who we are.

It doesn't have to be pretty. It can be tough. It can be gritty. Ride-backs are incredible -- those might as well be worth two because I think the defense kind of slumps a little bit when they see it and they feel that, and obviously it's a cheap one and it's one that you steal. To get that done a couple times in that second quarter was massive and really gave us a boost.

Then in the second game, quote-unquote, in the second half, some of those transition goals, great defensive stops, tough ground balls, running the field, creating, and then you John Piatelli with a couple there. Again, flipping the script on that felt like the difference maker and really what gave us some steam when we needed, especially coming out that second half and trying to manage all of the ups and downs of it.

Q. I asked the players to describe Harrison's role on the team and what he's brought to it.

CONNOR BUCZEK: Yeah, they said it well. Harrison is a workhorse for us, a guy that's been on the field since the day he stepped foot on campus. An incredibly gifted athlete and a guy that just keeps getting better in his role and what he brings to the table for us.

Quite honestly, having Harrison back for this fifth year was such a relief when it first happened, where we were anticipating that he was going to graduate last year and he got the allowance to come back as a grad student this year, and we were over the moon when he got accepted into that graduate program.

Having a guy like that that we can lean on with that type of game experience, that type of mentality, that poise on a relatively young team has been incredible for us, and most of that short stick group right now is relatively inexperienced, so he's brought a lot of experience, a lot of mentorship to that group, and clearly you've seen the strides from young guys like Davis and Smith and Bozzy throughout the course of the season because of someone like Harrison.

Q. We saw Hugh Kelleher have at least two bull dodges there, one he even broke a stick with. For you, what does he bring to the table for this team, and do those goals kind of give the bench a little bit of a spark when he's going downhill like that?

CONNOR BUCZEK: There's no doubt. He's a beast athletically. He's such a matchup problem and he runs so hard. You've seen him grow up over the course of this year, for a guy with those physical attributes that he has that maybe hasn't had the type of production that would indicate that type of athlete. He's just grown up and he continues to work at his craft and he continues to show up day in, day out and compete like it's his last opportunity.

For us, seeing him -- seeing it pay off on this stage was gratifying. I know that's the guy that shoots a million lacrosse balls and last week I don't know if he put one on cage and this week he was shooting well all week. We were talking about it, I said, I think he's going to have two goals this weekend, and sure enough, by the second quarter he had two and got another. Just a fantastic competitor, fantastic athlete, a guy that's just getting better at lacrosse, and I think his ceiling is so incredibly high, and like you said, because of the fashion in which he does it, which is just physically dominating, it gives everybody a little bit of juice when he scores.

Q. What was the maintenance like there in that delay as a coach, trying to keep a level? Obviously you basically did, but was there any concern as you see a 15-minute halftime turn into 45, into more?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Sure, it's always a concern there and the guys mentioned it, but I think it was nice to know that we had done it before. Two weeks ago we had the same thing happen when we played Ohio State in the first round

and we had to manage two stoppages of play.

The key, and especially on this stage, there's just a lot of anxiety that kind of happens from just having to sit and wait and wait for that opportunity and not knowing when it was going to come was a challenge. Again, kudos to the leadership for how they managed it. Our message to them was just physically relax, keep your mind focused in but don't waste too much time and energy just worrying about when it's going to happen. Just relax, and we'll let you know when we can get back up. Again, the leadership of this group, its mentality to manage the ups and downs and the false starts and those little pieces is truly incredible. It's really, really exceptional for a group of guys 18 to 22, 23 years old.

It falls on the leadership of this group, but the fact that they could manage it the way they did, come out the same way, and even again, give up the first goal in that second half and then fight back, just a lot of props to our seniors and the leadership of our team.

Q. I'm just wondering how long will you give yourself and your guys to enjoy this feeling and this moment before you turn your focus to we have a game on Monday?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Great question. We went in and kind of had a -- broke the team down in probably a more unceremonious fashion than maybe we normally would, and the thought was hey, we've got guys going to media, we've got guys who's got to do some other obligations, so let's enjoy it, wear the smile, get in the shower, do your thing, go see your folks, and then as soon as we hop on that bus, we've got to turn the page because you don't want to waste minutes, and regardless of which team we're preparing for on Monday, we know that there is an incredible opportunity on the table for us to turn around to Monday, so we don't want to waste any more energy celebrating this one than we have to in a 48-hour window. You can enjoy it, at some point we'll look back and realize how special that that win was, but for now you've got to turn the page and just make sure that we're right back to work and taking care of ourselves tonight and then getting ready for the game plan tomorrow and ready to come out flying on Monday.

Q. Obviously you're familiar with Princeton; if you play Maryland, is there anything that you can take from the scrimmage in the fall?

CONNOR BUCZEK: I don't think a whole lot to be honest. At that point we were just trying to figure out who we were. It had been a long time since we had been on the field. It had been a long time since we competed. Knowing how

good Maryland was, we were hyper focused on what we were doing and how we were going to get better throughout the course of that scrimmage. False scrimmages with some guys in, some guys out, makes things different and difficult to judge as a real litmus test. But I think watching them on tape this year, they're pretty incredible. We certainly have our work cut out for us if that's the matchup.

Q. You spoke earlier about how playing a tough schedule made it harder for you guys to feel like you were playing your best lacrosse. After playing a new opponent in Rutgers and potentially a new opponent in Maryland or someone you've already seen in Princeton, how does that change the mentality, and how do you go about your preparation?

CONNOR BUCZEK: I think the mentality stays the same, as you and I have talked about, playing that tough schedule, never really let us come out of the game and feel like we did everything right, that we dominated from start to finish. We played incredible opponents week in and week out. Even when the record would indicate we were having a fantastic year, the guys in that locker room never lost sight of things we have to get better on, things we have to improve on. We never hit that contentment point where everything felt good week in and week out, whether it was not starting or struggling in one area or another. Even when we were winning, beating good teams, there was that hunger, that desire to get better every week.

Again, as we watched film today and figured out what we've got to improve on for Monday and figure out who our opponent is, I think the feeling is the same, but certainly the schedule that we played, all that it was, has battle tested our guys, and you saw it the last couple weeks on the biggest stages. High-scoring game, low-scoring game, everywhere in between, these guys have managed the ups and downs and are prepared for everything.

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