

2021 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

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East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Maryland Terrapins

John Tillman

Media Conference



Virginia 17, Maryland 16

JOHN TILLMAN: Just want to congratulate Lars Tiffany, who's a good friend, and the University of Virginia. Very worthy champions. I thought they were outstanding today. But really have been outstanding in the playoffs. Just have been playing at a very high level and just were just a handful to prepare for, and obviously a handful today for us.

We did our best to try to keep up with them, and I'm certainly very proud of our guys. I really am.

But congrats to them, and I know we had the two guys on here, but man, I couldn't be more proud of a group.

When you get into this, you've got a lot of things you're trying to achieve as a coach and you keep score for a reason because you're trying to win games, and you're really doing that but you're building men and you're trying to teach kids about life and get them ready for a very challenging life. Man, what these guys sacrificed this year to try to put themselves in this position, and again, the things that they gave up to put Maryland in this situation, incredible.

I'm obviously disappointed for them because there's a lot of hurt in the locker room, but man, I'm thankful. I'm thankful to be with a group like that that every day you're just very motivated to work hard for them because they're just doing so much that a lot of kids aren't willing to do.

Not surprised they came back and fought until the end. Obviously got a great look there at the end. I thought Luke was tremendous in trying to get us back, and gave ourselves a chance at the end.

Man, I just love these guys to death. I'm just disappointed that time is running out here, so I'm going to try to soak up as much time as I can with them, tell them how much I love them and how proud I am. I think if you're a Maryland fan

today, you're disappointed in the ending, but you won't be disappointed with the effort and heart and toughness and character of this group.

Q. When you kind of look at what they were able to do offensively against you, was that athleticism? Was it depth? Was it kind of all-of-the-above type of thing, maybe more of a challenge than you'd seen all year?

JOHN TILLMAN: You know, getting ready, you kind of look at them offensively and there's just a lot of really, really good parts. I know you know them pretty well, but man, they are -- you look at that lineup, and it's a little bit of choose your poison, and I think Sean does a tremendous job of putting those guys in spots where depending on who you pull, they're going to kind of put you in spots where they get some leverage, and you have to make some decisions how much you're going to help and slide and if you slide too much they'll carve you up inside or skip and dodge you, and if you let your guys play a little bit, they can get to good spots.

It's really tricky because you're right, they are big, they're athletic, they're dynamic. They shoot the ball very well. I would say they're the best shooting team that we've seen all year. I just felt like watching them on film, like those kids can really bring it, and again, it's not just one guy, it just seemed to be a lot of them.

Again, I thought they really shot well. I thought they were very disciplined at times when they needed to play fast. They pushed transition. They got a couple off the face-off early which we had one day to prepare and we really harped on because we kind of had to prepare for that with Duke.

We gave up a couple there, and then after that I thought the guys did a great job. Conners gets one, and then when they had to play settled, again, they do such a good job of just kind of grinding you out and waiting for a really good look, and again, they canned them when they had those opportunities.

Q. Specifically with Connor Shellenberger, number one, what does he do that makes him such a difficult



matchup, and how would you evaluate your work against him?

JOHN TILLMAN: Yeah, Connor is terrific. He's an outstanding young man, too, a guy obviously we recruited and know and think the world of, and he is a -- he's just so complete. He sees the field well. He shoots the ball well. He's got a good feel for the game. So he does everything well. He's a very complete player. He was that way as a young guy, watching him play going through high school.

He's just really blossomed at this level, and not surprised. I know how hard he works, so he puts a lot of pressure on you. When he doesn't have the ball, you're worried about where he is, and when he does have the ball, he's winning matchups at times. Kudos for him. He had some shots and he really shot well today.

Q. It looked like in the third period our legs were going. It just looked like the Terps were flat. When they knew they had to come back, they did. Did you see that, as well? And also, I know it's the wrong time to do it and it's not sour grapes or whatever, but eight times in a row you're the second game on second. Why is that?

JOHN TILLMAN: You know, the second part, you're going to have to ask other people. I don't know who to ask that question to. I'm not sure who has that answer. You know, we seem to be in that spot a lot.

The good news about that is if we're in that spot, that means we're at a pretty awesome place, the Final Four. You know, obviously we're kind of told who we're playing in the tournament and we're told when we're playing, so we just follow our orders and try to do our best to prepare.

I felt like in the third we got off to a decent start. We got one and then they got a few, but then we got in some good rhythm, and I loved -- we kind of got back to us, and then I felt like we got away from that. The ball started dying a little bit and we kind of got away from trusting the movement.

Again, part of that you've got to give credit to Virginia. They're obviously very long and they're athletic and their shorties are really good, too, and they're strong in the goal, and Lars does a good job with them defensively.

We kind of got it back towards the end, but I just felt like at times we wanted to eat the apple with one bite instead of just kind of getting back to who we are, and it's not selfishness at all. This seem is so selfless. They're just a tremendous group. I just think guys were trying to get things going and maybe pressing a little bit, but not for any

of the wrong reasons. They were just trying to help the team.

This is about as selfless a group as I've ever been around, and like I said, it hurts that much more because this was the season of sacrifice. Like these guys bunkered in. They didn't see their families, they didn't get a chance to see their girlfriends. They tested almost every single day. Talk about giving it up for each other, and again, I look at what this thing is all about, these kids are going to be so prepared for life. They are. They know if they want to be successful they're going to have to make sacrifices, and if they obviously have families they're going to make sure they do what's best for the people around them because that's what they've done.

So I think that's what's special about this group is that these guys, just they get it. That's why it's hard, because you want to see those guys succeed.

Again, I'm just thankful to be with this group for this journey because it just makes me so optimistic about the future. You've got guys that it was always about the guys next to them, and we have an awesome country, we've got some things that we need to improve upon, and we have guys that I think can go out there and make a difference, and it gives me great hope because these guys will be leaders and they will make a big difference.

Again, if you're a Maryland fan, these guys, they're going to go out and make you proud, just like they made you proud on the field. I'm looking forward to that part.

Q. You called a time-out there at the 11-minute mark of the fourth period and it seemed like Virginia's offense slowed a little bit after that, only one goal, and you guys picked up a little bit. Did you change anything at that point? Did you tell them anything? Or was it just you had moments where you looked more like yourselves?

JOHN TILLMAN: I think at that point, to be honest with you, they had a long possession and they scored, and I thought, A, our defense was gassed, and I just felt like we needed a break, and we needed to kind of get everybody to catch their breath and talk about like making one play at a time. It just felt like they were seizing a lot of that momentum, and I didn't want them to get caught up in the scoreboard.

We have a group that can score quickly, but sometimes, like any team and any group, all of a sudden another team has success and you start thinking about that. So just want to get them refocused. We were able, we did bump into a pressure ride, which we don't do a ton of, and

Virginia is a great pressure ride team, but we kind of reversed roles and I think we got three back, so that got us some extra possessions. The kids scrapped and fought and we were able to get some transition.

But again, the fight in these guys is just unbelievable. And again, I kind of look at a micro, macro. I hurt for them, but in a macro sense what these guys have done this year has just been unbelievable. It just is. To do what they did in the conference, and I think everybody -- we got picked on a little bit for the conference, but if it wasn't for the Big Ten conference, there's no way we have a chance these last few weeks. That conference schedule was grueling and got us ready and battle tested. It was tough on the other side because I knew how hard it was, but I think we all saw with Rutgers how good they were and Hopkins was certainly hot at the end of the year.

Those guys pushing us made us better, and it got us better for this tournament.

Again, came up a little short, and like I said, I'm going to do my best to hug and tell each other how much I love him and care about him. It's not going to make it go away, but when these guys have a chance to step back and realize what they were able to accomplish, the relationships that they have and just know that they got a group that will be with them forever, they're part of a group that is really special, and they did nothing but add to the great tradition that is Maryland lacrosse.

I'm proud of them, but man, if you're a guy that ever was a hard shell or played in our program, man, you've got to like the fight in these guys. I wish we had executed a little better, and I'll take that, and that's on me, but man, these guys are winners.

Q. I know obviously emotions are really raw and really high right now, but when you reflect back on this year's group, what are you going to remember most about this year's team and what are you most proud of about this year's team?

JOHN TILLMAN: Man, I could go on and on about how proud I am. Like I said, I just saw what these guys went through. And I'm not alone in that. I think any coach in our department, the testing and I think anybody that coached this year on a college level, everybody in this country has gone through a lot. It's been really hard. It's been a crazy 16 months.

To be able to get this season off and be able to play, it was a lot to buy into. The sacrifices these guys have made, what they were willing to do, to do something they love, I'm not sure everybody would do, but guys were all in, as

Logan said, and they were just willing to do whatever it took, whether it was Jared Bernhardt, who obviously I haven't seen a better player out there and as good a player as he is, he's a better person, and thankful that he came back. I think you were able to see what we kind of had a sense he could be this year after kind of going through some challenging personal things with the passing of his father, coming back and getting some time with mom. He was so focused and dialed in, and I know Jim Bernhardt is looking down smiling. He'd be proud of his son. He'd be proud of this group. Jim meant a lot to us. He was like a second dad to me.

But man oh man, I think Jared showed you today he is an absolute winner, and I think the way he came back and focused, he made everybody else around him better, and again, just added to the legacy of No. 1.

This group, I don't think they're going to be forgotten for a long time. To get through our conference schedule twice and then win the tournament, beating teams three times, was so hard. Again, in those moments we were all celebrating, so obviously you've seen both sides of it, and it could have ended last week, so you're well aware of that.

It does come down to sometimes the smallest of details, and as a coach that's why you put so much into it, because you realize sometimes it does come down to one play, and you're trying to do your best to prepare your kids. Like I said, I wish I had done a little better job for them because I've been on the other side of that locker room and it's so awesome to see them smiling, and we've seen that a lot this year.

But again, this thing will kind of fade a little bit. It's going to be hard here for the near future, but I do think brother to brother, these guys, man, they've got something that's going to last a long time, and I know this, we did our very best to represent our school, our state, our alums with pride because we do love representing them and it means so much to us. We threw it all out there for them. We've got nothing left in the tank, and we took this thing as long as we could take it.

Again, you've got to say goodbye to guys here in the next couple days, which is going to be really hard, but I know this, those guys will be coming back for years to come and we'll be excited about bringing them back and those guys are on to good things. They're going to kill it, and I think the young guys coming back, they've been shown the way by some great leaders.

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