

2022 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Saturday, May 28, 2022

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Rentschler Field

Maryland Terrapins

John Tillman

Logan McNaney

Ajax Zappitello

Keegan Khan

Media Conference

Maryland 13, Princeton 8

JOHN TILLMAN: Yeah, excited to advance, have a couple more days with the guys. Hard-fought win. Hats off to Princeton. Super impressed on film watching them, and obviously playing them the first time, so we knew we were going to have a tough test today. Matt Madalon and his coaches have done a great job with that team.

Happy to be moving on. Not our best per se, but I think you've got to give Princeton a lot of credit to that. Our older guys seemed to step up when we needed them, and I thought Logan was terrific in the goal.

Q. Logan, the three-minute non-releasable penalty they got, you're guessing the first thing right out of the chute, rightly so. What do you feel like you guys were able to do defensively to kind of sometime I them after they got that quick one and how important was it to stem the bleeding there to one goal at that spot?

LOGAN McNANEY: Yeah, going into the half luckily we were able to game plan that and kind of had some options of what they set up in. Our defense did a great job. We overcommunicated. That was kind of what we were trying to do out there. It was a little loud. But props to the defensive guys for -- I don't think they got a shot on goal during that three-minute period, and then we got a 30-second push. We killed that, and then we cleared the ball and got to our offense who scored a goal. It was really good. I think that was very big for us in terms of momentum, and our offense and defense kind of fed on them.



Q. Logan, you had a career high in saves tonight with 19. I think something noteworthy was six in the first quarter, six in the third quarter. How important is it to you as a goalie to get those saves early, get yourself into a rhythm at the start and then coming out of the half, as well?

LOGAN McNANEY: Yeah, I think I can speak for all goalies. Getting that first save of the quarter, the half, the beginning of the game is huge for goalies. Once I get that first save it gives me the confidence to be able to make the next one and the next one.

But more than that, I think just clearing the ball is just as important, and I think we lacked a little bit in our clearing game today. We kind of wanted to get it out quick. At times we were a little slow on that stuff. But getting those saves early are very important for me.

Q. One of the big goals of that game was Bubba fair man taking off for about 65 yards. I guess he was running away from you guys, but what did you see on that play, and how did that jack up the team?

AJAX ZAPPITELLO: Bubba has done a great job for us. He has an offensive background, and anytime we were able to run and get that transition, we always want to do that. That's an awesome play style that we've kind of adapted, especially this year. Anytime you get a big defensive stop and you're able to turn that into offensive momentum, that's always a huge, huge goal, and I think that really just showed with the bench and the energy after that goal. It was a big one for us, and it's always exciting to see it really work out from defense to offense. So it was awesome.

Q. Logan, just piggy-backing off that, how important was Bubba with rogue an going down today and blocking shots at that goal on the other end with Keegan always grabbing for ground balls?

LOGAN McNANEY: Yeah, I think we realized we were kind of getting beat on ground balls, and they were making some good plays, props to them and everything. But we kind of had it in the back of our heads that that was going

to happen, so we had to step up, and those guys did that. I thought it was funny, Bubba jumping in front of that shot and hitting the back of his head. That was awesome. Guys like that, older guys putting their bodies on the line to win a game.

Q. When the game went to a four-hour delay, and I know it's difficult when you're trying to get in the zone and then you have four extended hours, how did you spend that time as a team?

LOGAN McNANEY: We had to keep it in our minds that we were going to play. It's not the best when you're getting ready to play, you're kind of getting amped up a little bit, staying calm, but once we heard that, we knew that we had to deal with that situation better than Princeton. As a group, we kind of just stayed up. We kind of had the right mentality going into that delay and got some food, got some rest, and then we came back ready to go.

Q. Keegan, this is your first time at championship weekend and you got a hat trick in the first quarter. What was it like just starting off that hot, your first game on a stage like this, and what was key to you starting out so quickly?

KEEGAN KHAN: Yeah, obviously it's a great atmosphere out there. I was pretty excited to be here. Really just wanted to come out and play as hard as I could, and I thought our offensive flow at the start was awesome. We got the ball spinning and Princeton has got really good defense, so we know we need to be sharp right out of the gate, and I was just in good spots, so took advantage of it.

Q. Ajax, Matt Rahill the last couple games, teams have been doing a lot to get him to play on ball, had a great game today. Can you talk a little bit about what you see in him as he's playing on ball instead of playing off ball?

AJAX ZAPPITELLO: Yeah, no, he's an awesome defender, someone I've been able to look up to kind of taking me under his wing being a younger guy on the team. They tried to do those little things, but he's such an all-around awesome defender, he works tirelessly after practice, one-on-one dodges. The scout guys are always giving us great looks, just matching kind of what Princeton is doing or any other team. That really mimics and carries over to the field, and I think it shows like him doing all that stuff after practice and the scout guys giving us great looks all week. It just makes it easier when we go into that game time and you see Matt Rahill being able to make those big time plays. Like I said, he's an awesome defender but a great leader on the field and kind of keeps that defense together. He's a really underappreciated guy, but he's

been awesome for us all year.

Q. For all you guys, today in the face-off game it was a little junked up, more scrums than a typical game. What did it do for you guys to know that Luke wasn't going to come out and just get it and go and know that you might have to fight for each ground ball and each possession?

LOGAN McNANEY: Yeah, like I said earlier, we knew this team, they were the No. 1 ground ball team in the country, so with that in mind we kind of had to -- their face-off guy did a good job scrapping it up in there, their wing guys, but when the ball came down to our end, we knew that we were going to have to defend for 60 seconds or however long it took, and we kind of just took it one play at a time.

AJAX ZAPPITELLO: I think we had a really good game plan from Coach Kennedy. They've got some really athletic players, 14 and 15, who are always trying to create that fast offense transition, and we just got a really great game plan for us and scout gave us a great look all week, kind of getting that early offense and transition game which we were able to kind of keep to a minimum, which really helped us out.

Q. First off, how is Roman doing at this point and do you expect him to be able to play on Monday?

JOHN TILLMAN: Good question. I'm not sure exactly what happened, how it happened. But just in talking to our trainer is awesome and our doctor was there, and kind of what I was getting was just -- I'm not sure it's the right thing to play him right now. We'll reevaluate tonight and see where he's at.

If it's ever something that, listen, we'd be putting him in harm's way, I'm just not going to let him do it. You know Roman, he could break his leg and he'll want to play. He's the type of guy, love him to death, I love his passion, we're going to have to protect him from himself, maybe steal his helmet or something.

Q. When you look at the way things have been going of late, a lot of blowout victories, to have one where maybe you had to muck it up a little bit more, had to grind it out, how encouraging is it that you guys were able to keep that separation all the way through including with that non-releasable penalty there in the middle?

JOHN TILLMAN: Yeah, I just felt like -- I have so much respect for Princeton. They are super athletic and they're long and you kind of see that on film, and they play a lot of guys, especially on defense, so they keep rotating fresh

guys in. I just felt like there were times where we just didn't play with poise and we didn't play as smart as we could. Like Ajax had a great game, but we come down on a break and we're playing a lot of defense and we go to the goal and just that was the time maybe to catch our breath and maybe possess the ball a little bit, just because it got tilted after the first quarter, I felt like we played a ton of D.

We tried to kind of mention to the guys, like you can't not go to the goal and you can't not be aggressive, but you really have to start thinking a little bit harder about pros and cons like risk-reward, like hmm, because if we take a shot and it hits the pipe, which I think a couple times we did, now all of a sudden we're going back and playing more defense.

You know, I didn't feel like we did a great job with that at times. We did have some timely goals. I did feel like Luke's stats weren't amazing, but we did get two on the break to Owen. I thought those were critical in the third quarter to kind of get some momentum and create that gap.

Q. You got creative with John Geppert playing a little short stick, a little long stick. You played 51 McDonald a bit. What did you think of your sort of makeshift defense on the fly?

JOHN TILLMAN: Yeah, kind of next-man-up mentality. Jack has been doing a great job, plays some man down for us, and he gets reps every week, and then Gep was a short stick. He was a middle in high school. We gave him a pole, shades of 2019. We had a guy go down in that quarterfinal game with Princeton so Gep would come off, he'd grab a short, he'd grab a pole. So he can do a little bit of everything. But just proud of those guys, their effort, and just willing to do whatever it takes.

Q. Most teams when you get to the postseason, you're talking about peaking. Are you concerned that you didn't bring the "A" game tonight? You still won by a certain amount of goals, but are you concerned about that at all?

JOHN TILLMAN: I mean, we won, and we kind of always look at each game and where did we go -- what did we do well, what didn't we do well, and we'll kind of go over it with the guys. This game because of the quick turnaround, just be some highlights of some things, but it's a semifinal game, so you expect it to be tough.

We won the game by five goals, and we didn't even feel like we played great. I think sometimes we have to catch ourselves and be like, listen, that's a good team we just beat.

But when you think your own standard, right, like did we play to our best ability, I think that's what most coaches will kind of emphasize.

I think physically I thought there was great effort. I just feel like maybe some execution and maybe some decision making wasn't quite what we've been, but again, sometimes when this happens, we talk about it, and hopefully respond well to it because we're going to need to do that on Monday for sure.

Q. The conversation around this team's place not just this season but in history gets a little louder with every win that you guys rack up and assuredly will be at its loudest over the next 24 hours or so. How do you continue to tune it out as it's getting louder and louder with your place in history?

JOHN TILLMAN: Yeah, I think that's when we -- I started hearing more and more, so I feel like we have to, because the guys get on their phones, they're reading that stuff, people are sending it to them, and we kind of counter balance them. Let's say we lost three weeks ago when everybody was telling us how bad we are, it's almost like the NFL, you win that week, you're amazing and you get six days of that, and then you've got to keep them humble, and if you lose you've got six days and you've got to pick them up. I think with our guys it's that balancing and reminding them that listen, like if we lose, then it doesn't really matter, does it.

We try to do things, we watched that Tom Brady "Man in the Arena" and we focused on the year where they were undefeated and they played the Giants and they lost. Just kind of the perspective of both teams and talking about, hey, you lose the last game, it doesn't really matter. None of that really matters now.

We're really not into the comparison game. Like people if they have that extra time and they want to compare us to other things, like we really can't get caught up in that. We just need to be the best version of ourselves, and I think our guys have a sense of that, and right now it's just a matter of in the next like 36 hours or so, what can we do to put our best foot forward, prepare but balance the rest, and kind of manage everything in terms of our preparation.

A little bit challenging, it's just not -- I don't think people realize we kind of do something at the very end we rarely do all year, so it's very unique, and again, sometimes it's the luck of the draw in terms of who you play, when you play, and just got to manage it the best you can.

Q. I don't know how much of the first game you had an



opportunity to see, but what does it mean for you just as a former Cornell player, obviously Coach Moran had a ton of Maryland ties, just to see these two teams as the last two left standing in a year where Coach Moran passed and both teams are trying to carry on his legacy.

JOHN TILLMAN: Crazy, right? Man, he's up there smiling, I can tell you that much, his alma mater and a place that he called home for a long time. Man, I don't know, but sometimes stuff, weird stuff happens, and I know he's probably super excited and proud of both programs.

Connor and that team, they've done a great job. We've scrimmaged them over the last few years, and we scrimmaged them in the fall, so it's funny, the first opponent we played this fall in October up at Delbarton, New Jersey, is Cornell. But great tradition. Probably for Donville and I, probably the team that we didn't want to play because we love the place so much, and it means a lot to us, but we realize that's just part of it. We've got to kind of just block that out and focus on prepping the rest of the team. We owe them that, so that's what we'll do.

But again, it says a lot about what Connor and those guys have done, that staff has done to get to the championship, and just a proud alumni base and fan base, and again, they've got a lot to be proud of.

Q. Coach, obviously killing that penalty at the end of the first half and going to the second, you guys were already on a scoreless streak there, and then you guys killed that penalty, killed the ensuing 30-second penalty. Do you think that really helped swing that momentum and kind of turn defense into offense on that four-on-one that really put you guys into the lead?

JOHN TILLMAN: Yeah, we talked about that at halftime, if we could kill that, that would be a huge momentum swing, because when you get a three-man unreleasable, if you cash in, you're going to get the momentum. But sometimes if you don't, there's a little bit of like oh, man, we didn't really make the most of that opportunity.

I felt like we failed a couple clears on that that we'd love to have back where we just didn't quite get it into our end and possess it, but I do feel like we got a little bit of a break when they had the ball with about 25 seconds and decided to hold it. You're losing like a sixth of that three minutes just to hold it and make sure you get it back, so that got down to one, and that was our style at halftime was like, hey, it's like being down for a minute. There were 61 seconds.

So we actually thought they would come out with a play, so

we changed what we did, and we shut off a guy and just changed it up so that we could disrupt it because at that point it was if they score quickly then it's a man down face-off, you've got three guys -- they have three versus our two at the face off X, so as much as it was like stopping that, was like kill as much time, so if we could get it killed, even if they scored, we were back to, all right, it's going to be 10 on 10.

And then of course we don't get the ball out, and then we get a 30-second penalty, so again, I felt like that kind of started swinging that possession time to the other end, and I felt like we were kind of fighting an uphill battle the whole time.

Q. Several big miles since today, one of them Logan Wisnauskas, 200 goals, also breaking the Maryland record in goals. I know he's not one to toot his own horn much, but did he at least acknowledge it?

JOHN TILLMAN: No. Logan, listen, I think Logan has done so much, and I joke with his dad, 20 years from now, he'll look back with maybe some fondness. I think when he broke the record, we had the ball -- someone tried to give it to him, and he didn't take it. So I took it. After the game I made sure that he got it because his dad was like, wait a minute, you didn't get the ball where you broke the record? So I was like, no, I got it. He's just so focused and dialed in and he's not about individual accomplishments, and that's what I love about him. But you kind of know 20 years down the road there will be some things he'll be super proud of, but I think he's in the moment and he doesn't want to make it about anything else but the team, which listen, I love that about him.

When your leaders are doing that, the rest of the guys follow suit.

Q. You've been here before a couple times, obviously, but this year you have five, six hours left before the championship game. Does that change how you prepare at all?

JOHN TILLMAN: Well, I think we have to kind of make a decision now, like by the time we get done, it's 9:30 -- I don't even know what day it is. I'm joking. But it's 9:37. We've got most of the guys on the first bus. These guys will be on the second bus. Shower, clean up, get our treatment, stuff like that, then we have to figure out how quickly do we want to start our prep for Cornell, how much do we want to do and trade off of sleep right now, because I think sleep is the most important thing in terms of recovery.

And then how much do we want to give them before 1:00

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

on Monday.

I watched a little bit of that game today, and sometimes it works out, like I tried to watch the Princeton-Cornell game pretty intently. It was one of Princeton's last regular season games, and then they didn't go to the Ivy tournament, so that was like their third-to-last game, so I was able 2 for 1 there, which was helpful, and then we did scrimmage them in the fall.

Again, they played great today. They looked awesome. So we'll definitely have our work cut out for us, but at least it's not like a team we just didn't really see all year. So I think there's a little bit of carryover that we can utilize, but again, just trying to balance how much do we want to give them so their heads aren't spinning and we can play fast and free and really play and execute well.

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