

2023 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Saturday, May 27, 2023

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Lincoln Financial Field

Penn State Nittany Lions

Coach Jeff Tambroni

Jack Traynor

TJ Malone

Media Conference



Duke 16, Penn State 15

JEFF TAMBRONI: Congratulations to Duke, and good luck in their championship game. I'm obviously heartbroken for our guys. I thought they just battled throughout the course of today, and I hope that when we leave here today, and I know it's going to be a challenging one, that they can just look back with no regrets. They left their hearts on that field today. Just really made our staff and Penn State just so proud.

Q. For both players, how do you guys react to a moment like that, especially how the game ended? And for TJ, can you talk about your six-goal performance today?

JACK TRAYNOR: Yeah, we're definitely not a group to sit up there and point fingers and kind of ask what if. Unfortunately that was the circumstance. Just try to hold our heads high and be proud of what we accomplished.

TJ MALONE: Yeah, it was really tough to see kind of how that ended. But that's how it happened. Just our offense was playing amazing all game, so it was just fun to be a part of that.

Q. TJ, you guys were chasing this game for most of it. What did it feel like when you guys finally got even, and how well do you think you guys handled that pressure of being behind most of the way?

TJ MALONE: We've been playing from behind most of the year, and we were exactly where we wanted to be. We knew if we were close in that fourth quarter then they were going to start feeling the pressure, and that's exactly where we wanted to be, and that's where we play our best. We

just couldn't get over that edge.

Q. TJ, I know you said you and your classmates wanted to leave this program better than you found it. Although you once again were stopped in the Final Four, do you feel like you were able to take another step for this program?

TJ MALONE: Yeah, I think the culture that this senior class has continued to build is in a better spot, we hope, and we hope that the younger guys can continue to build on it and to sustain it for the future.

Q. TJ, six goals, you were facilitating the ball well, playing well. You went against the No. 1 seeded team in Duke and you took them to the limits, took them to overtime. What was your mindset from the start of this game and with the performance that you had today?

TJ MALONE: Yeah, I think the mindset was just if we play tough and we play together, then it gives us the best opportunity to win, and we knew that the pressure was on them to kind of win, and we didn't have any of that pressure, so we just went out there and tried our best and stuck together throughout the whole time, and I'm just so proud of the team for that.

Q. Do you guys feel like you gained a lot of new fans today for those that had never watched a Penn State lacrosse game before today?

JACK TRAYNOR: I would hope so. I think that when we go out there, one thing we try to do is just play hard, and I think you're going to attract a fan base if you're team is going to go out there and play as hard as you possibly can. We might not always be the most talented group, might be some teams out there with more talent than us, but we play hard, and hopefully people see that and appreciate that from us.

Q. Did you see any evidence in them, they're a really good team, been playing from ahead most of the year, that when you kept hanging around, hanging around, hanging around, any sort of, who are these guys, from Duke, especially in the second half?



JACK TRAYNOR: Yeah, we just tried to keep chipping away. Didn't really try to look too much into who they are. More worried about who we are, especially offensively. Just trying to play 6-v-6, not trying to get into those 1-v-1 match-ups, trying to use all the guys at the same time, and I felt like we did a good job breaking them down, and like TJ said, wanted to just keep it a close game going into the fourth quarter, and we felt that from there we'd pull away because it's kind of what we've done all season. We got in the situation and we just couldn't get past that point.

Q. TJ and Jack, can you describe the extra man at the end of regulation and then the subsequent possession after the extra man ended?

TJ MALONE: We tried our best. We didn't want to force anything. They played pretty good defense.

JACK TRAYNOR: Yeah, I thought we sat on 3-3 trying to get some movement going. I thought they covered it well. Then I don't even really remember much from that final possession, but obviously they played some good defense.

Q. Jeff, that last play, did you have a sense of that in terms of in the crease, not in the crease, and any thoughts on whether there should be an expansion of video review in the sport moving forward?

JEFF TAMBRONI: Yeah, I mean, yes, to the latter part of that question, there should definitely be a review. At what point and at what level we implement that, I hope it does go in there at some point.

There are plenty of calls missed throughout the course of a lacrosse game. With three extremely capable officials trying to cover 100 yards, it's bound to happen. It certainly was not a malicious call. I haven't even seen it, to be honest with you, so I have no idea if it was a right call or a wrong call. It was a call.

I think probably the latter of that, yes, there should be, especially at a game like this, on that stage. It's available, but at the same time I recognize that it's not a part of our game, and we understand that we've got to live with the result and just move on.

Q. Over the past two years of struggling, adversity, all the sorts of stuff you've had to deal with as a program, talk about what this season has meant and how you guys have gotten here, and then to go into OT against the No. 1 team.

JEFF TAMBRONI: Yeah, I said this to the guys in the locker room real briefly and probably challenging to

articulate how much I care about this group. They've been through a lot. It's tough. It's been tough to watch at their darkest moments.

Even Jack, Jack hasn't practiced the last two weeks and he's still battling injury, and just having the No. 16 and the heart behind 16 out there today just meant the world for our team. Yeah, just really proud, and I think having a bus ride home from Philly back to State college will give us a chance to reflect.

I never want to walk out of that locker room with a regret. I've been in this situation before where we've lost in a tough game in a controversial call, and the one thing I hope and I just expressed to these guys is that there's just no regret. I couldn't see a guy on the field that just didn't play as hard as he possibly could or love his teammates the way these guys did today.

They've left a terrific legacy behind and one that now is upon our staff and team to just continue to keep following.

Q. Jeff, what were the defensive adjustments that you guys had to make without Jack today? It seemed like Will Costin stepped up into a big spot, and how well do you think you guys collectively did, especially on O'Neill?

JEFF TAMBRONI: Coach Bucci did a terrific job. If you look down -- that's one of the best attack units. We think a lot about our attack unit, so I say one of the best attack units in the country, and we're down there with two freshmen, Mac Costin and Alex Ross, and then two sophomores, Kevin Parnham and Jack Fracyon, and they played their tails off today.

It was a one-on-one matchup in the first half. They scored nine goals in the first half, and I think three were assisted, so we just weren't forcing them to throw the ball to the next man enough or taking away ankles, and I think we adjusted at halftime to try to get out in front of them a little bit, take away their strong hand a little bit, and forced them to have to play more team than individual.

They have some tremendous athletes, but we were defending with two freshmen and two sophomores, and we just felt if we could make it more of a team game, our guys could play fast enough to stay with, and if you look at the adjustments there, six goals in the second half with that group out there, I thought it was a tremendous effort by that group.

Q. What second half adjustments did you make with regard to Brennan O'Neill? He had a strong first half, but in the second half he got really quiet. What

adjustments did you make and any thoughts you can share?

JEFF TAMBRONI: We definitely wanted to push out a little bit more to make it a little bit more challenging for him to manage the ball. We thought if we could limit his touches in the second half, more so than we did in the first half, that was going to give us a better chance.

He shoots the ball really well, obviously, and I think it was really challenging for Jack to pick it up in goal, and then when he had the ball we were just trying to support Kevin as much as we possibly could.

Again, we felt our advantage, both zone and man, was team defense, not individual, and I thought in the second half we did a much better job of supporting Kevin in his efforts.

Q. Jeff, four years ago, I don't know how you want to say it, maybe the stage was a little big for those guys. Nothing like that today from these guys. How would you describe their demeanor that way?

JEFF TAMBRONI: Yeah. It was incredible. I give Jack, TJ, Brett Funk, captain of our team, who doesn't even dress because of injuries, he's out there; Aleric Fyock, our backup goalie; C.J. Battaglia. The guys on that team were incredible in their leadership. They told the story what it was like to be here the last time we were here, and I feel like we just got way out ahead of it, unlike we did in 2019.

You can only say so much. You have to feel it. But I thought these guys did an unbelievable job.

The other thing, they just prepared like pros all week, and in order for everyone else to feel comfortable and confident, you have to see guys who are leading your team play at that level, and I just think watching these guys play today, the fact that Jack made a decision yesterday that he was playing, and I think that gave us a huge boost emotionally, and then to watch TJ play the way he did today, it gave our guys an enormous boost.

I give them a lot of credit, because to your point, we were the No. 1 seed then and things didn't go that well, and today these guys from all accounts probably shouldn't have been in that game but were, and I would say it was because of their poise and their leadership.

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