

2024 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Saturday, May 25, 2024

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Lincoln Financial Field

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Lars Tiffany

Connor Shellenberger

Cole Kastner

Media Conference



next few days here. They have been held together by Rebecca Vozzo and our training staff with magic tape.

But we just got exposed today. But I will say Colucci did great, didn't he? How much he battled in that second half, he was able to start neutralizing and get the ball more.

We got beat and we got beat soundly by a coaching staff with a great defensive game plan. And couldn't generate enough offense when we did have the ball. And we tipped the proverbial cap to John Tillman and wish him well in the national championship game against Notre Dame.

Q. What were they doing defensively that made it so difficult to get open looks? And when you scored that first goal one on one on Ajax, did you think that might be a look that was there all day?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Maryland does a really good job slowing down their slides against us. Obviously they really made us earn it. Obviously they're very close and great (indiscernible). And part of our game plan was attacking their shorts.

But give a lot of credit to their shorts (indiscernible) and middies. They played good, sound, tough defense and made it really tough on us.

They also took away all the off-ball stuff which we do really well with Payton and Jack in there. So they make it really hard. And they have really good players and really good coaching staff. Makes it tough.

Q. UVA lacrosse is different to you compared to every other player and even record-breaking player because you grew up here. (Indiscernible). What does UVA lacrosse mean to you?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: You trying to try to make me cry? I'm passionate. It means everything. I've been going to the games since I was 10, 11 years old. This team means everything. I just can't believe it's over.

Q. Connor, sorry to add an extra question here but they talked about trying to keep you guys out of

Maryland - 12, Virginia - 6

LARS TIFFANY: Thanks for sticking around to talk to us as well. I know you've got deadlines and gotta get moving.

What a ride this has been, the year 2024 for us. I hoped I was going to be here as winning coach saying, what a ride, that our ten-man ride was able to get us some extra possessions like we were last weekend against Johns Hopkins that allowed us to get that -- the come-from-behind victory happen. But it wasn't to be.

We talked to the team earlier this week about possession. Why is possession talked about in the month of May by the Virginia coach when we don't really talk about it that much?

Turnovers happen. We want our guys to play free, unconscious, loose. We don't worry about having long possessions. But all of a sudden in May we do.

And I asked the team, not rhetorically, and they came back with great answers. One, it's hotter. It's warmer. You don't want your defense to get worn down. And two, the opposition keeps getting better and better. Unfortunately, we were on the wrong side of the possession today. Give Luke Wierman credit in that first half where it was really lopsided.

And we were generating a lot of shots but we just weren't putting them on cage and we played too much defense as it went on.

So on one of those days where we needed the ball more, Luke Wierman wouldn't allow that to happen.

I'm grateful for Thomas Colucci and Anthony Ghobriel. Both of them are going to be going through surgery in the

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transition and how their priority was to make it as much as a 6-v.-6 game as possible. Did you sense that pretty quickly? And how much did that kind of contribute to your struggles as an offense not being able to generate some of that?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Definitely, they take away the transition really well. They get their (indiscernible) middies back in the hole. Even with our early offense game they still make it really tough. And when you're not able to get those couple extra goals that we're able to get each game, whether it's in transition or early offense, you have to beat them 6-v.-6 like they force you to. It makes it really tough.

Q. Cole, when you have so little possession when you're out there offensively on a hot day, what kind of toll does that eventually take on the defense?

COLE KASTNER: I think it takes a toll on everyone, but I was really confident in our guys doing our job and executing. I was so confident on our offensive end doing their job and executing, regardless of the conditions. And at the end of the day we didn't get them the ball enough.

They do amazing things up there. We do some really good things. A lot of credit to Maryland for keeping their stick for (indiscernible) and executing really well.

Q. You were pretty involved in clearing the ball early on, especially -- one, what kind of a role did you take on in that area today with the change in goal? And how would you evaluate Kyle and what he brought in the cage today?

COLE KASTNER: I was so proud of Kyle. And I've been so proud of Matt, too. Both of them have an amazing way about them, where they're so confident and so well spoken in the goal behind us. They're never looking to blame someone else. They keep it very internal.

And it's really kind of like an embarrassment of riches when you have two guys you can turn to and they do a great job on goal. So much credit to those guys.

In terms of clearing, they weren't putting a whole lot of pressure on us to clear the ball, so I felt pretty comfortable going over there and whoever else was making those plays too.

Q. Connor, lacrosse is the strange structure where you have to turn around get ready for professional where you're heading soon. What has UVA lacrosse done to prepare you for that quick transition and getting into the field all season; you're a rookie year

this summer?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: That's a good question. I don't know what they've done to prepare me because there's really nothing really like it. It's kind of the first time going through it.

But I mean, we always pride ourselves on being built for May, I guess. And kind of the way we structure our weeks for this time of year. And obviously with a UVA jersey on that didn't happen this year. But hopefully that helped me a little bit for the start of the summer season here. And it's going to be a lot of lacrosse.

Q. How early in the week did you settle on Kyle for the goalie assignment? And how much did you sense them selling out to make sure that you couldn't get transition opportunities and forcing --

LARS TIFFANY: We really had only one intense practice with the depth chart process. That was Wednesday. It was actually balanced on Wednesday. I thought Matt Nunes played better than he had been in the last couple of weeks.

I loved how he came out. Kyle had a solid, steady day Wednesday. So we went to the man who won us the game against John Hopkins. We knew pretty early on. We didn't want to let John Tillman and the press know. But early on we knew it was going to be Kyle Morris.

But you could see with Maryland, they don't set up an aggressive ride, whereas we're the opposite. We have our ten man ride, and we're trying to create havoc. They were content to just simply get their offensive middies out as fast as possible and let us run over the midline with very little pressure.

It was a different philosophy, but a very good philosophy because they always had their stout D middies in there. We couldn't create slides today against that team defense consistently. Noah Chizmar, one of our D middies, when we were playing early offense, he got slid to and got crunched, but because we were dodging an offensive middle at the time, when we dodge their D middies, their off wall defenders were very comfortable not sliding and making sure they could stay -- have somebody on Payton Cormier all the time and keep the matchup on Ajax Zappitello and Connor.

We were trying to change that with some off-ball motion, but when a defense doesn't have to slide, they don't have to worry about holding spots or playing sides. Just stay with your man, we're not sliding there.

But to answer your question, when we did trap an offensive middle for Maryland down there, we had one or two early goals. That phase does not transition, but then they still have some offensive middies trap. That's what we call early offense. We had some success there, but not enough.

Maryland did a nice job of being smart with the ball and taking away a lot of early stuff.

Q. I know you haven't had time to break down the season, but some things didn't come easily the last seven games. Was that just a product of playing elite teams for the most part during that stretch, or did something just kind of change?

LARS TIFFANY: It was the intensity of the schedule. Now with the ACC, when I first arrived here eight years ago, our game with Syracuse was in late February and going to be another ACC game in mid-March. Now that the ACC Conference has our games concentrated in April, we were playing really tough teams, going up to the Carrier Dome, going to Duke, playing Notre Dame twice. So it's a gauntlet, but our men love it. I love it, and it certainly prepares us better for the month of May.

Some years you can really put your finger on it. This is who we are this year. There were some days we gave up 18 goals on defense. There were some other days we gave up seven or eight. So we're not really a defensive-minded team. Absolutely we'd like to play fast offensively. It was a combination.

So I don't know what the chapter title, if it was my book of UVA this is chapter 8, year eight. I don't know what chapter 8 of year eight is. I'm tremendously grateful, the courage and warriors. We've already had three men go under the knife; we have four, five surgeries coming up next week.

We look more like a Civil War battle unit than any other team I've ever had as we're limping here to the finish line. And Connor has been fighting through things that we don't like to talk about with the media, and as a lot of the men are.

It's interesting. Like leaving last year from this venue, we had Connor Shellenberger and Colin coming back, couple other players, we lost a ton, most of the defense, and a ton of really good middies, and it was like, whoa. And in a lot of ways, there's a joy and a success that we got back here despite having lost about 19 men.

And but I'm at University of Virginia. We don't measure ourselves by hanging final four banners, we measure

ourselves with titles.

Q. When Connor takes Ajax to score the goal right in the first minute of the game, did you think, okay, that's going to be there, or did you kind of know that's going to be where you can hang your hat all day offensively?

LARS TIFFANY: It was a great start to the game in so many ways, but tactically I was hopeful that that would make the offball defenders for Maryland maybe turn their head a little bit more.

So getting that goal early on was huge for us. Unfortunately, that was more the anomaly than the norm the rest of the game because Ajax was able to neutralize that match-up consistently. Whether we had a pick to try to rub him off or no pick, Connor wasn't able to shed him enough.

But, yeah, there was some excitement in our sidelines like, oh, wow, they're trying not to slide to that match-up; we just scored a goal, let's keep going there.

What I saw the rest of the first quarter was others coming around taking low angle shots that weren't going in. I was like, fellows, can we take the next step to glory? I don't think they're sliding; I don't think you're going to get crunched. I have to watch the film. But we kept settling for some low-angle shots. Connor stuck his but there wasn't much there. We needed to take that extra step.

Q. Impossible question, could you sum up what Connor has meant to your program and the career he's had?

LARS TIFFANY: From my perspective, when my family, when Tara, Charlotte and I moved to Charlottesville, we lived in a hut next to my friend JP's house.

I was only there a couple months. So I know Connor Shellenberger committed to us in my first couple months in that job because I was at that little hut. And he changed his mind from his previous commitment. So in a sense, even though he's only been with the team for the last five years, he's been a part of UVA lacrosse for my entire eight-year career.

So I don't know life at UVA without him. The anticipating his arrival and certainly what he did for these four and a half, five years. He was redshirting the COVID year. I wish we hadn't done that. He could have six more games under his belt.

It's Patrick Mahomes retiring. He's our quarterback. He does everything. He's just so humble, so wonderful to be

around. Not a conceited, arrogant bone in his body. Yeah, it's going to be really hard to replace that.

Q. In terms of the future, McCabe Millon set a program record for goals by a freshman. Kyle and Matt are guys who have eligibility ahead. You mentioned all the new faces, they have experience. How do you feel about the state of the program going forward?

LARS TIFFANY: It's a great question, because as I was alluding to earlier, a year ago I was like, oh, boy, here we go; at least we have Shellenberger, we'll build around that.

Same sort of thing. It's like wow, we're losing so many goals and so many assists from Payton and Connor and Cole Kastner how he did.

Obviously Braden Erksa didn't play attack today, but Cole was wherever Braden went. He did a nice job on Braden. Cole has been is our guy who takes No. 51, Pat Kavanagh, who takes the elite.

We'll really miss those guys. And certainly what Chase Yager gave to us for one year as a (indiscernible) middle, being able to take the ball away; he really neutralized some great dodgers.

But there's some really good ball players coming in. There's a transfer portal I've heard about that we've got to dive into, look into for the next couple of weeks here, and see if we can rebuild this.

But these two, and Cormier, you don't find them in the transfer portal. You don't find them easily. We'll pick up the pieces, get back to work. It's been a blessing. What a joy to coach these men.

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