

2024 DIV III NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Sunday, May 26, 2024

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Lincoln Financial Field

Tufts Jumbos

Casey D'Annolfo

Connor Garzone

Charlie Tagliaferri

Media Conference



and for our group. But I think what got us back here was our ability to start day one the next day and just get back to work.

You know, you can't learn from your mistakes if you don't make them and there was a bunch of mistakes we made in this game last year. It wasn't pretty at all times during the season. We had some bad games. We had some good games.

But I think we just trusted in our coaching staff to put us in the right position to win, and just trusting in the guys around us and doing our job.

Q. Defensively, Connor, this Gaston, he had five goals against you when they beat you earlier this year. You only have one goal today, and you guys dominated them on the ground balls. Really did a nice job defensively on them. Your comments on that?

CONNOR GARZONE: Yeah, he is one of the best players in the country, there's no doubt about it. It's not fun playing against him, and I've got to give him credit for that.

I think the defense today was we were a little bit smarter in sliding off him. I think we stayed a little sticky on him ask didn't give him those same low angle looks that he's so good at but I think really it was just a collective effort, Coach Toomy putting us in the right spot, Joey Waldbaum, Michael Ayers doing their job and giving me shots that I could save.

Q. Chuck, you scored that goal 12 seconds in, 15 seconds in. After last year's start, to get the start like that, did it kind of calm the group down and let you guys settle into the game a little?

CHARLIE TALGLIAFERRI: Yeah, definitely. I think in a game like this, it's always nice to get the first one. The nerves are high, especially like Coach said, we have a young team, some guys haven't played in this game but a lot of us have. We knew -- we forgot about last year. We were like, we're going to start this different. We knew we were capable of doing so.

Tufts 18, RIT 14.

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: Just super grateful, super proud of this group. You know, again, if you had asked us, hey, like you know, this senior class is going to do this, I don't know if we would have felt a hundred percent sure about it. Super small group. They have a lot of different roles in the program and we are a pretty young team. I think we are ahead of schedule on that.

But those seniors really embraced their jobs, their roles, and you know, just over the course of the last month, really bought in and made us the best version of ourselves. Just so grateful to the alums, just for supporting us.

Again the expectation at Tufts is to win a National Championship every year and it's been a few years since we've done that, and the alums really stuck with us, stuck with me, stuck with the assistant coaches, believed in us. Nothing but positive encouragement and that means the world to me and to our guys.

And you know, we knew we were going to break through eventually. I'm just really proud and really grateful that we were able to do it with this group. So we're really happy to be here.

Q. You guys were here last year. To get back here, can you take us through the journey to get to this point, starting from that moment at the end of this weekend last year where you didn't get the result you wanted, what started that day that brought you to today?

CONNOR GARZONE: Yeah, I think obviously losing that game last year was a pretty brutal moment for our team



Just getting that early goal I think everyone was like, let's do this. Let's rock. We are ready to go, and we got this.

Q. You guys went in and out of a zone at first, and I think the way that you set it up with the poles on the bottom stopped them from getting those looks they wanted to get underneath. As a goalie, were you happy to see those shots from not the low wing but the higher wing?

CONNOR GARZONE: Yes, certainly, I think definitely when you are take playing a team like RIT, it's a lot of guys with a lot of box experience. So they are good on those low wings. That's what they are best at.

Coach too many and the entire defense felt like those top right, top left shots were ones we could afford to give up and ones that I could save, and I think our defense did a great job. We knew Joey Waldbaum and Michael Ayers on those pipes, it's tough to get a pass through there.

So those guys did a great job of forcing those top center, top right, top left shots and giving me ones I could save and guys breaking out and get fast breaks going the other way and score goals.

Q. Last year was like trying to end a perfect season. You said you guys are younger and you had the loss a few weeks ago in the quarters. Did you feel like the pressure was off and it that helped you?

CHARLIE TALGLIAFERRI: I think with a couple of losses, I think it was the reset we needed. Nothing is going to be given to you. Everything, you've got to earn it, and I think that kind of punch in the face from Hamilton, like it woke us up and took us to reset.

We really emphasized on getting better ourselves. Not focus on anyone that we are going to see. Not focusing on the NCAA Tournament. We took those two weeks just to work on ourselves, get, like, just as better as we can as a team, and you know what's going to happen in the NCAA Tournament, focus on the little things and the big things will take care of themselves. That was the focus for us. Get better each and every day.

CONNOR GARZONE: I think as us being a young team, there are certainly going to be bumps in the road. Those losses not only helped us reset but helped us look at some of the weaknesses that we had and some of the mistakes that we were making. Thankfully a lot of those were very fixable mistakes, and I think it was a good kick to us.

Any team in the country can beat us and we can beat any team in the country. We just have to play our game and

get those ground balls, do all the little things that make this program so great. You know, I think we did that.

Q. Wondering how you guys used the earlier meeting with RIT today.

CONNOR GARZONE: Yeah, I think defensively, there were some things we looked at from their game earlier in the season that I think we had to adjust in this game. Specifically, like some of our slide packages, some of our slides with the near pipes. I think they really beat us on some of those last year -- last game.

So I think it was making some adjustments to that, and you know, implementing a little bit of zone this game. But I think most importantly, you know, the reason we lost that game and the reason we won today was the little things, the ground balls in front of the cage, plays in the middle of the field, clearing the ball, riding the ball.

I think you know, that was really the difference-maker and when we looked at the film, it was like, these are all things we can fix with pure effort. This isn't skill. This isn't talent. This is just us working harder than them, and I think we were able to do that today.

CHARLIE TALGLIAFERRI: Offensively, I think the film was crucial. Being able to go back and seeing what they are trying to do against our offense. We had a couple different offensive playmakers, getting pieces moved around, I think that helped us give them a different look than what we gave them before.

Like Connor said, seeing the mistakes we made and to be able to adjust those. And overall just kind of some fire offense. Not trying to do too much, work together, and just know the easy looks will come.

Q. You had three goals in the first quarter. You were quite the facilitator, too, out there. What was it, RIT's defense was something you could just react to? What was it out there for you?

CHARLIE TALGLIAFERRI: When you have guys like that trying to attack, they command so much attention and it helps kind of our midfield group get a lot of space, make the looks very easy just because of our spacing. Because they don't want to slide off those guys. They are great shooters, great dodgers. It gives me, Garrett Kelly, Chase Beyer, all our middies a lot of space to read the defense.

RIT is a really good defense. They have been very good all year and so for us, biggest thing, like I said, working together, spacing them out, trying to just use some of our athleticism to kind of get the easy looks.

Q. Curious your opinion. Is it harder in a game like this to come back or to hold a lead when the action is this fast?

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: Well, you know, fortunately we've seen RIT every year since 2021. So we are pretty familiar with each other, and so we were really able to prep the guys on what this game was going to be like.

So when we go on a run, we know that they are capable of coming back. When they go on a run, we know what we have to do to try to counter punch that. Earlier in the year, they went on a run after we did and we were not able to counter punch. I think for our guys, it's just keeping that mental toughness, which is what they did.

Again, it's such a young group. Just to see those guys really mature in the second half of the year. After last year, I would prefer to be in the lead. That's way more fun. But I think having that little cushion early on was good for our guys. I think it settled us down a little bit and allowed us to play with a lot less -- a lot fewer nerves out there.

Q. Building on that, you get out to the early lead, you're up 8-3 in the blink of an eye. How do you balance that moment of we're off to a great start with the reality that RIT is going to come back in this game? They are too good offensively to be comfortable now.

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: Yeah, I think that's a testament to the guys. Being here last year was huge for us, just to understand what it's like to be out there on the field. The crowd noise, the size, and we told them, hey, listen, during the game you're not going to be able to hear us as a coaching staff, and they knew that. I'm proud loud and they can't hear me.

Every time they came off the field, whether it was a time-out or end of a quarter, it was coming from them, hey, we're good, don't get too high, don't get too low, we're good, we got this, get us the ball, we're ready to go. To see that maturity out of such a young group was pretty incredible. I just tried to say as little as possible today and let the guys run the show.

Q. 65 straight starts for Connor. What does his presence mean in the cage for you guys, and what has he brought to the team in his 65 starts?

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: He's a rock back there. It's pretty cool, he was actually Liam's backup at Chaminade. So he got to learn behind a pretty decent goalie.

And so I think for him, you know, and I think with all these

seniors, right, like they didn't have a senior year because of COVID.

So really they came to college without ever having to be the guy or without ever having to be that leader. We asked Connor to be that guy sophomore year, and he a great year. Then we went and played RIT, and he probably had the most frustrating game of his career. You know, they were up 10-1 halfway through the first quarter, and I think that could really buckle some guys and really affect guys mentally.

Instead, Connor just used that to, Hey, I've got to be better. I've got to work. That's on me. I'll keep grinding. And you know, we're really excited to have him back next year, and he's just really a calming force back there.

Q. Backtracking a little bit to the bracket reveal, you guys are going to go on the road, some really good opponents ahead of you. What was the message to the team at that point?

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: Yeah, we were -- it was a pretty consistent message. After the Hamilton game, I got after those guys pretty good. Lit them up just because it wasn't like I was angry with them as people but I knew that we weren't maximizing our potential. And.

So maybe we had to change up our message as a coaching staff a little bit and just try to figure out a different way to get these guys headed in the right direction.

And really, from that Monday on, those next two weeks, we were like, you can send us anywhere. You can accept us to the carrier dome. You can send us to clocker, and we'll be excited to play. That was the messaging.

I think for us, we knew that we were going to get in and we didn't really care where we were going. We were just focused on us and being the best version of us. Again, it would have been nice to have some games on Bello, but on the flipside we got three weeks in a row of a lot of bus time, a lot of hotel team, a lot of team meals, very few distractions.

Being on the road, especially during graduation and all that stuff, and really just a chance for us to get closer as a unit. I think that you saw it today how much that paid dividends for us because that was a really cohesive unit out there, and we couldn't have done it without Garzone or Chuck or the last guy on the bench. We needed everybody and we got everybody today.

Q. You guys are so young. Do you feel like you were playing with house money knowing you have so many



of these kids back next year?

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: That's the trap, it's like, we're going to be back a bunch, right. We talked about it last night at the team meeting like, listen, think, I think we are really good. I know we are young but we can't take this for granted. We can't take this opportunity for granted. You can say, Hey, we are going to be great. We are going to be great every year. We are going to be here every year. And then all of a sudden you get complacent.

But I think more than anything else, it's just gaining experience for those young guys. We played four or five freshmen today. Probably played ten sophomores. Played only three seniors, four seniors. So the standard is set now and we are going to push these guys pretty hard next year.

Q. Can you just talk about that moment at the end of the game, the horn sounds and you're the victor?

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: I was just super proud. As an alum -- I said to the guys in the locker room after the game, listen, when we as a team win a National Championship, every alum feels like they just won the National Championship.

I know what I came here, I graduated in 2006. When I came here in 2010 and we upset Salisbury, I was just a fan in the stands, but I felt like I would I won a National Championship. So I know how much that means to those alums, and I really do think we have the best community in all of lacrosse across any division. Those guys care so much and, they are so supportive. If we need anything, they are at the ready for proactively jumping up, hey, how can we help, how can we make this easier, how can we make this better.

Again, between coming on the heels of Mike Daly who is a living legend, and going to five National Championship games in six years or seven years or whatever it is, and winning three of them, that's pretty big shoes to fill.

So you have that, and then COVID happens and all the other stuff and you're like, this isn't very easy. But you get to lean on those guys, lean on the alums, lean on the parents, and they are just there for you, and they make your job easier. When you have that kind of support, it makes your job a lot easier.

Q. Can you talk about the series in the fourth quarter, 2:30 left late in the shot clock.

CASEY D'ANNOLFO: Very rarely do we say, Hey, we are not going to the goal. I think I say that maybe like once or

twice a decade. I think our guys, understanding the situation, we know how surgical RIT can be.

Obviously we have seen them every year, and they can score a million goals. So just understanding the situation. I think that has been the coolest over the course of the last month is after that Hamilton game, just saying to the guy, Hey, trust us. Trust us. We are going to tell you exactly what to do on offense, exactly what to do on defense, and if you guys buy in, we can have a pretty special run right here, and there were no egos.

The guys really did buy in to what we wanted to do, and so really get down to that last exchange, and you know, just tell those guys, Hey, we know what we are doing here. And they sort of give you the head tap like, Hey, we got this and I just had all the trust and all faith in the world for them to get the job done.

Let me just say real quick, I want to thank you guys so much. I think lacrosse is an incredibly special sport where Division III is really in lockstep with Division II and Division I, and the amount of coverage and publicity and in us and attention that you guys give Division III lacrosse is unlike any other sport.

I'm just so incredibly grateful to be a part of you guys and to have you guys in our corner, and I just want to say thank you so much for everything you guys do, so appreciate it. Thank you, Guys.

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