

2025 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Monday, May 26, 2025

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Gillette Stadium

Cornell Big Red

Coach Connor Buczek

CJ Kirst

Wyatt Knust

Ryan Goldstein

Finals Media Conference



know, obviously one I'll never forget. But one I've been dreaming about for a while.

No words that can really describe that feeling but it was definitely special.

Q. You guys being seniors, just trying to go out and avenge that 2022 national title loss, what was the road like for you guys to get back to this point and how did it bring you guys closer together, especially going up against a team like Maryland again and exacting that revenge?

WYATT KNUST: Yeah, I mean it was cool to finish the way that you started your career, getting to faceoff against Maryland in the National Championship. Throughout our careers, we have had a lot of ups and downs. We had the high of going into the National Championship our freshman year. Sophomore year, ended up going out in the first round with probably just as good a team as we had the year before. Junior year, don't make the tournament. And then we really used that as fuel for this year and just showed up to work every single day extremely focused, and just focused on this one goal, and we made it happen.

Q. Two generations of Goldsteins to get this trophy back to Ithaca, what does it mean for your family?

RYAN GOLDSTEIN: I've been going to Final Fours as long as I can remember. Both my parents played lacrosse at Cornell. My dad was fired up for this one. Hasn't really hit me yet but I'm sure it will soon. Happy to be with this group of guys. It's been awesome.

Q. The sea of red today was crazy. What does it mean to have that fan base and how lacrosse is growing as a sport?

CJ KIRST: Yeah, they are the best. Kind of spoke to the team last night about that moment where you drive by that tailgate, like you said, on the bus with the police escort and seeing everybody that supported you. It brought tears to a couple guys, and guys are feeling chills. Just to have that support when you're playing on the biggest stage is incredible and it definitely motivates you.

Cornell 13, Maryland 10

CONNOR BUCZEK: Hard to put into words. So incredibly proud of this group. They had a mission. They had a goal. And every single day they showed up to work. They didn't know when the margins were going to change. They didn't know.

What it was to help separate, but they are a resilient group and a tough group and they led one another.

The ownership was within and when you have a team that does that with as many leaders as we have on this team, the ceiling is really incredibly high. For these guys to achieve this goal and bring a title back to Cornell for the first time in 48 years, I simply don't have the words for it.

But I'm so proud as an alum and as a guy that gets to work with them every single day. They have earned everything they have gotten, and I'm glad we can enjoy this moment together.

Q. CJ, I'm sure you've played this out in your head in terms of hoisting that trophy and running to the Cornell fans at the end of the game. What was it like and is it better than you could have imagined?

CJ KIRST: It was special. You know, this season has been incredible. Like Coach said, this has been our dream. We walk out there for warm ups and the sea of red and the alums that support us every single day and the families that have put in all the work from when we were little kids to be on this stage and to have that moment to grab the trophy, run over there, is really special. You

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Going into the game, you see that crowd and the support, I know everyone was so excited to give it everything they have got. We competed for 60 minutes because of everyone there. Wouldn't have been able to do it without everyone up there.

RYAN GOLDSTEIN: I think that it's not just today, it's every single game. And then every single game texting us, every single game day (indiscernible) -- texting CJ and -- (indiscernible) -- those guys and so many more that care so much about this program. It comes from our culture, we talk about it all the time, and you see that today. But it's every single day, we go out for those guys and we play for those guys.

Q. Coach Tillman said CJ is Player of the Year this year, and Ryan might be Player of the Year next year or rest of his career. How have you made each other better, and what do you see in the future for Ryan Goldstein here?

CJ KIRST: It's an incredible question. Having the opportunity to play with Ryan the past two years has been incredible. I've said this before, but he's just a fearless competitor. He brings everything he has every single day. He's the biggest lax rat I know, watches every single game you can imagine, every single highlight tape, and that's just who he is.

Lacrosse is a part of him, and that's the reason why he's so dedicated and on this stage succeeding because he's put in all the work and all the hours. The future is bright for Ryan. I know he's going to be Player of the Year, and I know he's going to have it all. He has two years to prove it. He's got the program now. I'm excited to see where that goes.

Q. Today's game was a true back-and-forth match. How do you keep your composure when there's so much on the line playing such an overwhelming team?

WYATT KNUST: We try to have the same intensity and focus every single day of the year no matter it's a practice or scrimmage or game. Having intensity for the little moments like that helps prepare for the big stages like today. Just like Saturday, I would say that no one ever had any doubt, everyone believed the whole entire way. That focus got us to where we needed to be, and just really proud of this group.

Q. Curious, what does it mean to be a Cornell man and how does Coach Buczek and the rest of the coaching staff support that?

CJ KIRST: When you step foot on campus, you hear about the culture. When you're recruited, they talk about the experience that you're going to go through and how it's going to be challenging and nothing is going to be given to you and you have to earn everything.

When I first started, had COVID going on, I wasn't really fully bought in in the program. I wasn't experiencing everything, and in that 2022 season, I learned everything from Coach Buczek, the whole coaching staff and that senior class, what it meant to show up every single day, to put the group in front of you, to put a smile on your face during the hard times, to listen to Coach Howley and what he has to say after a lift, to listen to all the alumni and all the motivation that they give you every single game day.

It's a special program, and you can't really describe the culture that we have unless you're a part of it. In my four years here, putting the jersey on for the last time today, I'm super proud of what I've been able to experience. And I speak on behalf of the entire senior class. We try to do everything we can to instill that into the younger guys.

And you know, I have Coach Buczek and Coach Stevens, Coach Ciferri to thank for that. Super happy that being a Cornell man is going to continue for the rest of my life, and happy that we are able to bring it home for all the alumni who have taught us everything.

Q. You mentioned the ups and downs, and last year there were downs for you. For you to have this moment as a National Championship goalie, what does it mean to you?

WYATT KNUST: It's the coolest thing I've ever done in my life. I mean, throughout my career, been battling through the ups and downs and just try to stay as level as possible. I'm so grateful for the coaches and the other players for believing in me. We all believe in each other so much, and as I mentioned earlier, throughout this season, we've been in some tough positions, and there's never been any doubt.

This group is a really special one, and it showed this entire year.

Q. The last time Cornell won it all, its top attack was the legendary Eamon McEneaney. What does Eamon's legacy mean to both you and this program?

CJ KIRST: Yeah, Eamon is someone I thought about a lot while we entered the playoffs, where you think about the numbers 21 and 10, and George Boiardi as well. That's what we talk about and you learn when you're a freshman here, you learn that they are the best teammates ever. They put a smile on someone else's face inside the locker



room, and they are fearless competitors.

To be able to touch that sign every single day and be a part of that tradition that we talked about, it's incredible. And you know, I know Ryan, Mike Long as well, you dream about those attackmen, Mike French, Rob Pinell, all the people who have put on the jersey, to be able to hug Mike French after the semifinal game and to get motivational words from Eamon's teammate, you want to do it for them. Special feeling and super happy that we were able to get it done.

Q. Can you talk through what you saw differently in the second half?

CJ KIRST: I think with a quick turnaround from playing Saturday and competing today, it's just all confidence and belief in your group. You know, in the second half, we're all talking that we had to play our game, and we had to draw slides, and if they didn't, we were able to put the ball in the back of the net.

That's the mentality all of us were talking about. Coach Buczek pulled me aside before the second quarter and said play your game, have some confidence, have the belief that you're going to run hard and get it done. With that little word of wisdom, I was able to do it. I have my teammates to thank because they had my back this whole run. And yeah, it was just a great day for the Big Red and great day for that group of offense.

Q. At 10-9 in the fourth quarter, you had two stops. Talk me through certainly the first one and just how important you think those two possessions were in securing that?

WYATT KNUST: Our defense stepped up huge. I would say that we brought it in after they scored those two goals in the fourth, and just knew that we needed to up our communication, play more aggressive, get out, get on their hands. I think we really brought it to them for those final possessions. You know, Staub came up huge in the middle of the field with some tough ground balls, giving the offense extra possessions.

But I would say just the heightened sense of urgency and everybody on the defense stepped up and was able to get those stops that we needed.

Q. What did you see from your team in the fight on the ground ball battle today, and how important was that in securing the trophy?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Massive. Massive. That's the difference. Possession is this game and the ones that

bounce around out there, the ability to finish possessions on your defensive end and your ability to earn opportunities on the offensive end make the difference.

We preach it every day. It's Cornell lacrosse. People ask me every game, what's the difference? It's ground balls; our ability to pick up the ball off the turf. We preached it every day in practice. We talk about it being the corner of our press play, and today they made the Cornell lacrosse tradition proud with their ground ball effort.

Q. The nature of the program, what would Richie Moran say about this team?

CONNOR BUCZEK: He would say it's great to be here. The cool part about Richie is until his final days, he was always around. He was the conduit and he was the connector and the guy that he didn't just ride off into the sunset. He kept giving back to Cornell lacrosse. He kept making sure that the culture was strong; the family was strong. And you know, those terms get overused at times in sports, and he created that.

I know he's looking down on us smiling. He did so much for me as a player, as a young coach, for our older guys, they had the opportunity to meet him in that '22 season. He's such an incredible man and incredible legacy, and we are fortunate to uphold that legacy day-in and day-out.

Q. Can you talk about how surreal it is to meet the same team in this situation?

CONNOR BUCZEK: We talked about the opportunity to be back in this moment and how we can draw off that experience, and just the short turnaround Saturday to Monday, the playoff run and how lacrosse changes when you get to the do-or-die moments and the ability to just stay the course and be resilient and be tough.

Again, nothing different, but it's a little different when you know that, you know, you exit stage left if you lose. For our guys, for our older guys and for the guys who played in that, it was great to draw off that experience and maybe add a little motivation of being here and not getting over that hump.

For the most part, a lot of fresh faces on this team but utilizing all the experiences, the good, the bad, the opportunity to play in the National Championship and the stinging loss of not making the tournament last year. I think all of those experiences really drove us forward and created the team that we had this year.

Q. CJ talked about you pulling him aside before that second quarter. How did you see him respond in that



second half, and what did you see differently from him in that second half?

CONNOR BUCZEK: You know, he came down the alley on the one, and I saw him clutch the shot a couple times, and not frequently do I see him (inaudible) with a hand free clutch the shot. So I wanted to let him know. Best player in the country, and we trust him to do everything. Doesn't have to be perfect, but we know the effort we get from him. We have his back. Go make the play. Put yourself out there.

Glad to see him get going. He's the difference-maker. It's not always the points, the goals, the assists. It's how hard and how much he gets out of his teammates and how well liked he is because of the respect he's earned within that room. So when he gets going, we are a different team. And he found it in the biggest moment at the biggest time and pushed us over the hump and earned this National Championship for our team.

Q. Saw you have a warm conversation with John Tillman when it was all over. What is your relationship with Tills?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Coach Till is the best. In terms of what we do as a profession, he's the best there is. He works his tail off. He works relentlessly. That team year-in and year-out is the standard for what it means to be successful in our sport.

And on top of that, him being a Cornell alum, him being a guy that is a good friend, mentor, confidante that always has looked out for myself, our staff and especially the young guys in this business, always had a ton of respect and appreciation for how he's looked out for us. You know, taking great care of us.

So I really appreciate Coach Tills. He's as good as they come. He's got that team ready, and you know when you play the Terp's, you have to make a heck of an effort and you've got to be near flawless to beat that team. And so have a lot of respect for what they do and how they compete day-in and day-out.

Q. What's your appreciation of the group, putting everything together over the course of the last 12 months?

CONNOR BUCZEK: I spoke about this on Saturday but just to reiterate. When you have great leadership within your locker room; when you have not just CJ Kirst, not just Wyatt and not just our captains. When you have guys that are vetted, top to bottom, 16-person senior class and those guys are holding the line; those guys are enforcing

the standard; those guys are demanding a lot of their teammates it makes a different team, right.

When every guy only has to impact two or three guys through your whole roster, it makes you a dangerous team. Everybody is held to task. Everybody is demanded. So for every one of those guys, if they are not doing it themselves, they can't hold anybody else to that standard.

Again that is a Cornell lacrosse tradition thing. That is a culture thing. That is something that we didn't build, but we are very fortunate that when you get the right collection of people that really demand and push and encourage and get a lot out of their teammates, our job is really easy.

We don't coach effort. We don't demand that the guys meet that standard as much as when they do it from themselves. And when things are not great, we hold the seniors accountable and we hold the leadership accountable. Makes my job a heck of a lot easier, rather than me trying to make sure I am finding the right buttons to push with 50-some guys, they are able to do that, and I can find the right buttons to push with, you know, 15.

Q. What does it say about Cornell when this whole weekend whenever you walk out for a game, you have a Cornell man in the box on the opposite sideline?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Yeah, it's pretty cool. It's pretty cool. I think this place is very endearing. It's a lot of reason why I'm in the profession that I am and I'm sure it's a big reason why he's in the profession that he is. This place changes you, and for the better. And it's not because it's easy; it's not all rainbows and butterflies.

It's because it challenges you and asks a lot of you, and through all that, when you can kind of see the forest through the trees, you can appreciate every moment. You can appreciate what this game does and has the medium to connect with young men and lead in a certain way and to push guys to be their very best and that's on the field and off the field and what they do for the rest of their lives.

I'm sure that Coach Moran had that impact on Coach Tillman. I know the coaches that I played for had that impact on me. This program changes you for the better, and we are just fortunate to continue to live the dream every single day.

Q. You're the first coach not from Maryland New York or Virginia to win a National Championship. How do you describe weapon representing your background?

CONNOR BUCZEK: Thanks for the question from an Ohio guy himself.



It's pretty cool. It's pretty cool. I think it's a huge plus for the growth of the game side. Obviously my family has ties to upstate New York and that was a big part of my upbringing was their connection and background with it. To see the way the game has grown in a place like Ohio and seeing it in Cleveland and Cincinnati and the way it's really taken off. There was a point when there were very few club teams. My first time was second quarter lacrosse player was with a sixth grade team because there just weren't enough teams and not enough players.

Now at every age group there's so many teams, there's so many people, there's so many conduits for this game to grow in non-hotbed areas. It's cool to push that thing forward. For us, it's about continuing to give back and making sure that a lot of underserved areas, get as much coaching and players that go back that we keep pushing that forward and keep growing this thing to hopefully get it to the level that we all want it to be.

Q. This is a team with incredible star power. What did it mean to see the first two goals coming from the second midfield line and seeing those guys step up in the highest-pressure game of the season?

CONNOR BUCZEK: It's awesome. You know, that second midfield press this year has been a collection of different faces and we've dealt with some different injuries and different guys that we've had to find opportunity for. They have done nothing but step up and get better every single day.

Our motto is relentless commitment to improvement and those guys have embodied it on the biggest stage and got us going on the first two goals if I'm not mistaken. So proud of those guys. They work so hard day-in and day-out and they play with great confidence and that comes from guys like CJ and Ryan and Mike to continue to push those guys to be better and let them know they are doing a great job.

So proud. Those guys did an excellent job. We talk about, every guy has got a job to do. We need every guy in that room together doing their job, and if we collectively do that, we are going to be successful as a team. And those guys were a huge part of starting us up on the offensive end and taking some very meaningful shifts, and even if the ball was in the back of the net, doing the little things to make sure we weren't giving away an easy one in transition.

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