

2026 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Saturday, May 23, 2026
Charlottesville, Virginia, USA
Scott Stadium

Duke Blue Devils
John Danowski
Charlie Johnson
Benn Johnston
Aidan Maguire

Semifinals Media Conference

Princeton 14 - Duke 7

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head Coach John Danowski, Charlie Johnson, Benn Johnston and Aidan Maguire. We'll start with an opening statement from John Danowski. Coach, all you.

JOHN DANOWSKI: Well, we want to congratulate Coach Madalon and his staff and the Princeton team for a terrific win. They certainly whipped us today, and for us, looking at statistics, I think we can agree the way the game is played now, I'm not sure which statistics are pertinent. You know, we took 47 shots. We out ground balled them. We won for face-offs. Cradling was flawless in the second half. Obviously the one that jumps out, obviously, is the saves, the Princeton saves.

Turnovers, we only had nine turnovers over the course of the game, with 47 shots. And I thought that Princeton's style of defense we ran past people. We had opportunities, and when you don't make them on those short offensive possessions, then we played defense, you know, for a lot more than you probably want to.

Hit a couple pipes early in that first half, which again, I'm not saying that would have changed the outcome of the game. But maybe our guys relaxed a little bit. Maybe they shoot a little differently.

I thought when we made a mistake on the defensive end they made us pay. So that's the mark of a really good team. But they're very talented, very explosive offensively and they made some plays where you gotta tip your cap.



Q. Benn, how did you kind of size up what Croddick was doing in goal for them and the way you guys kind of approached things, and how much of that are you kind of kicking yourselves over on shot selection or shot placement or what have you?

BENN JOHNSTON: I mean, yeah, he's a terrific goalie. I think a couple of the shots early in the first quarter if we dropped those, I think he wouldn't have been as hot throughout the game. Yeah we hit a couple pipes. A couple of them rung off his head and hit a pipe. It's tough. It's a game of inches, really, sometimes. But yeah, I wish I could get some of those shots back for sure, but you can't do that at the end of the day. Yeah, played a good game.

Q. For Charlie and Aidan, how do you describe the game plan in settle defense, particularly felt like you guys were very willing to switch and you saw a lot of short-stick matchups on Nick Kabiri?

CHARLIE JOHNSON: Coming into the game, our game plan was to short stick number 0 and have poles on 2, 10, 19 and 48 on the first midfield line. And it's a defensive philosophy that we have where we trust our -- everybody. And when you're sliding in dodge, you can't be chasing guys around all the time. It doesn't work. When you play a team like that, so talented and plays so together, it's really difficult to just turn your back and follow your guy around.

So, yeah, even if I'm guarding a guy who is a great player, he's got a lot of points, I trust Aidan or the LSMs or the other short stick team middies to play.

You're right, we got a lot of, No. 2, he got a lot of switches, especially behind the cage, but I actually thought our D middies did a good job for the most part behind the cage. They hurt a couple of times from up top a lot, but I thought our slides were effective. They're phenomenal shooters, and they're really talented, and you give them an inch and they'll make you pay. So that's what you saw today. Phenomenal job from those guys. I mean their midfield was really impressive as well. So hats off to them on the offensive end.

Q. Aidan and Charlie, if you want to follow up on this,

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

the amount of defense that you guys had to play, did you feel like that that had kind of a cumulative effect on you guys, especially once you got into the second half?

AIDAN MAGUIRE: Not really. I think we trust our offense and we hit a lot of pipes. Goalie made some plays, and the ball went the other way sometimes in transition. And we played a lot of defense, but we trust each other. We trust our scheme, our athleticism. And, yeah, maybe we were playing tired, but you know, I think we trust each other even when we are playing a lot of defense.

Like Charlie said, you give them an inch, they'll make you pay, and they did. Yeah. Johnson yeah. I mean, I completely agree. They were phenomenal late in the shot clock. I don't know how many goals they got with under 10 in the clock, but it was quite a few.

But I didn't feel tired, honestly, out there. We won a bunch of face-offs, especially in the second half, Cal Girard and the entire face-off unit were incredible, and they really fought. And we had possessions, and over the course of a 60-minute game you will play a lot of defense, especially against a team like that.

But I don't think it was a product of that. I think Princeton played incredibly today, and they shot the ball and moved the ball really, really well. It's a testament to them.

Q. Aidan, you close out an incredible Duke career. What has it meant to you to be a Blue Devil?

AIDAN MAGUIRE: It means a lot. It means everything. This team's been my family for four years. Coach D took me under his wing, Coach Cap, 40 and KU. They gave me a chance, and they brought me into the most special group I've ever been a part of.

So it hurts, it being over. And it's going to hurt, but I'm just going to be so proud to have said I knew these guys, those guys in that locker room. The alums, just to be a part of the program, is just incredibly special, and I'm so grateful just to say I was part of it. I love these guys. I love this team.

So it means everything.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, gentlemen. We'll take questions now for Coach Danowski.

Q. John, it felt like one of the more pivotal moments in the game was the last minute and a half of the second quarter when they scored twice and turned a one-goal deficit into a halftime lead. Can you describe that

sequence and how influential it was?

JOHN DANOWSKI: I was trying to call a timeout. I was about 15 yards on the field, and the official said he didn't hear me, which was disappointing. I would think that the officials at this level of play would have understood that with a minute left and knowing that we had timeouts available, that might have just glanced over his shoulder. But -- so that was disappointing.

And then Matt Christmas takes the shot, which was probably not a great decision, you know, at that point. Ball goes down the other end. And all of a sudden there's a swing. And so that was disappointing.

But we said, listen, again, at that point we had taken 25 shots, only turned the ball over three times in the first half. It's okay. It's a two-goal -- it was a two-goal deficit, but it's going to be okay at halftime. And then the first two possessions of the third quarter Liam crushes, goes right down Main Street as well as Max Sloat and we don't get anything out of it so instead of it being 5-5 early in that quarter, it stayed that way.

So nobody was freaking out at halftime and we were ready to go, and there were plays to be made early in that third quarter.

Q. John, kind of along those lines, as you have those opportunities to make plays and they don't fall, do you sense guys getting a little tighter or a little frustrated given that the goalie was playing well, but also it seems like there were some meat left on the bone, too.

JOHN DANOWSKI: Yeah. I thought we had some really good looks. There was a sequence where they had a 55 situation and they shot the ball stick side high and it went in. And then we had a similar -- almost a similar play from the same spot in the field, stick side high, you know, and he catches it, you know. And it's like it was the same play on both sides, but they made the play. And in these games, you gotta make plays.

Again, structurally you say to yourself, man, the face-off game we didn't give up a goal in the face-off and we scored a goal on the face-off game. We scored a goal in transition.

But our offensive midfielders went 0 for 23 shooting. You're not going to win a lot of lacrosse games when that happens.

Q. John, kind of a key juncture late in the third quarter, you get one of the rare extra-man opportunities of the day and their goal tender not only

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

picks off the pass around the crease, he starts a fast break and they score short-handed. It did seem to deflate the team at that stage. It was last seconds of the third quarter. You score there, it's a different game, isn't it?

JOHN DANOWSKI: You know, you're never certain which play is going to turn momentum over the course of a game, whether it's that shot that hits the pipe and your team relaxes and your opponent gets tight, or the play that you're talking about, they score with 33.6 seconds left and now all of a sudden you're playing from behind again. It was deflating, but -- and to be honest, our goalie shouldn't have been out of the goal while it was a 10-man. It shouldn't have been a full-out 10-man at that point because we're a man up. But young men, you're coaching young men, and they get excited, and that happens.

So it's -- again, there were plays over the course of 60 minutes that do, and you never know which of those plays, but that was certainly one of many that I thought that at the end of shot clocks, at the end of a quarter that we gave up that were disappointing.

Q. John, may I ask you about Princeton and the challenges, do you put your best guy on 2 or do you put your best guy on 10? I know Penn State did it a little differently from you. What are the challenges there, may I ask?

JOHN DANOWSKI: I think you have to understand what your personnel is and then you have to take a look at their personnel and say, hey, this is where we match up the best. And I think different every week. I don't know what goes on in the Penn State locker room. But I can say for us, we thought that this was a way to go about.

And I look at Wade's statistics. I know he went 2 for 12. And the one time we don't switch up top, very simple switch on a pick and right in the middle of, again, in the middle of the hash marks and we don't switch. Kid just steps in and has one.

So I thought that, again, structurally, the game plan was solid, the execution at times was lacking.

Q. Max Sloat has been so important for you this season, and I thought there were two shots in particular that stood out. The one was early in the first quarter when he was funneled to the middle and he took the right-handed shot that was save. And then I believe it was either his fifth or sixth shot, I think which Benn referred to. I think it hit Croddick in the helmet and then the cross bar. He reached for his head after as a sign of exasperation. I guess a two-part question.

Can you speak to the role Max played on this team and then his performance today?

JOHN DANOWSKI: You know, Max has come such a long way from a high school attack man in California to running midfield with us. He'll be back next year. He's got a fifth year of visibility, took a medical redshirt, and I just think that he's going to keep getting better and better.

But, again, you can't goal for nine in these games. I mean you can. And he did. But we needed Max today to get two. Wade went 2 for 12. We needed Max to go 2 for 9, you know, to keep us alive and keep the enthusiasm and keep the confidence going on the side. And when it doesn't happen, it's a long road and it's all uphill.

Q. John, given -- we talked this week about where this team was five weeks or so ago. What's the appreciation for what this ride was like for you guys? Not relative to anything else but just overall what you feel like you'll remember most about this bunch?

JOHN DANOWSKI: I think, somebody said this to me and I don't think about this stuff too deeply during the season, but it was a great life lesson, this season, that you just keep showing up every day, and you keep working and good things are going to happen.

It's not always going to go your way, like today. But if you just keep on working at whatever that is, you know, and for these guys this is their passion, and they've worked at it, and they showed up to practice. Again, we didn't change anything structurally. We had a couple of 6:30 or 7 am team meetings on Monday mornings, with just me and the team. But those are the things that to us make you stronger and help build your character a little bit.

I think it's just a great life lesson. You just keep working at it. One day when these guys are dads and they're talking to their sons, they're going to say, hey, when I was an athlete, you know, this is what I learned, you don't ever give up. You keep working, and good things are going to happen.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports