

2026 NCAA Women's Lacrosse Championship

Friday, May 22, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Martin Stadium at Northwestern

Northwestern Wildcats

Kelly Amonte Hiller

Taylor Lapointe

Maddie Epke

Madison Taylor

Semifinals Media Conference



special, having all the students athletes and all the students, and everyone that's been a part of setting this whole thing up for us, all the facilities people, so much goes into it that we got to see this weekend.

It's just really special being a part of this, and I'm just really grateful to be here.

MADDIE EPKE: That was my first time playing in front of that many people, and that was just so cool to see that many people support our program. I think it really helped us to be in that environment where everyone was believing us in and cheering us on. It was awesome.

TAYLOR LAPOINTE: Yeah, I definitely think being surrounded by all of us that love us and support us and put so much work into having what we have, and I just think walking out and seeing everyone, it was just a lot of gratitude from everyone on our team.

Q. Madison Epke, when did it feel like it clicked for you, now? It feels like you're playing some of your best lacrosse this last third of the year? And for Madison Taylor, can you talk about her coming along and joining the team what she's added?

MADISON TAYLOR: Yeah, I think it's been awesome to have Maddie join us -- Maddie, Maddie, Maddie -- we have three Maddies.

It's been so fun getting to watch her grow not only as a player but as a person, too. We played with each other before in Hong Kong but we didn't know each other that well.

So I've just been so grateful that I have like a new best friend and it's just been so awesome. She is playing her best lacrosse yet, and we're not done yet.

MADDIE EPKE: Yes, not done. I think it just gets more comfortable as you go on with this team. Because every single day, this group is so talented. There's so many people you don't even see getting these goals that are doing so much for us in practice to make us better, like all around us every day.

Northwestern 16, Johns Hopkins 11

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, you know, I think today was just a really special day for our program. I can't thank everyone enough that has done everything to get this championship here and to make this championship special.

Today was like a day that we will remember forever, and just to have another opportunity to play in that environment, we're just really blessed and grateful.

Q. You had more goals and assists today than your entire freshman season and a career high in assists. How do you feel you've grown since you came to Evanston?

TAYLOR LAPOINTE: I definitely think that I've really found myself and my confidence, like, with the help of the coaches and the people around me. Like we talked about before, like we grow as people here in this program. And I just think me growing as a person has just helped my lacrosse more than elevated my lacrosse to be a better person.

So I'm really grateful for the people around me that even just helped me get the confidence to play how I did today.

Q. For all three of you, what was it like to, first, step out and see that crowd of everyone from your school supporting you?

MADISON TAYLOR: Yeah, I think we were just talking about it, like you just said, it's going to be a day we'll remember for the rest of our lives. Like, that was so



So It really makes you better as the season goes on, and that's why you're seeing us play some of our best lacrosse right now. It's really cool to see this team grow and I'm so happy to be part of it.

Q. After Hopkins mounted the first little comeback to bring the deficit closer to them, a time-out was taken. What was talked about in that time-out?

MADISON TAYLOR: We talk about resetting a lot. I think it's been a big thing of ours, and we've seen all year that there's so many ups and downs in games, and it's a game of runs. They were going on a little run.

So I think when we did take that time-out. We usually take like a deep breath and we just kind of try and reset our best and refocus. Especially for the offense, we just needed to stay focus and disciplined throughout the whole game, especially when they were playing zone. We really didn't want to take any plays off.

So we were just talking through that and staying connected and just believing in each other throughout the whole time.

Q. How do you describe what you saw from your defense out there, especially with the amount of turnovers they were able to cause?

TAYLOR LAPOINTE: Yeah, I think they are amazing at what they do, and we play against them every day. They work so hard to put trust in themselves, the person next to them, and they also like trust us that we will have their back.

I think just knowing that we have a defense that we can trust to make a stop when we need to or just like believes in us, I think it helps us play to our best and play more free instead of worrying about what can happen if we turn over the ball.

Q. There are a lot of hopefully future lacrosse players in the crowd, really young. What is one message you guys have for them?

MADISON TAYLOR: I think just, honestly, it's really simple, but just having fun and really enjoying playing the game. I think when you are focusing on that, you just genuinely enjoy what you're doing, and it's always like the best part of my day, and you always want that to be the best part of your day. You don't want to put any stress or pressure on yourself to do certain things, like I have to have this or I have to do that.

It's more just like, I get to do this and I get to play lacrosse,

and it brings me so much joy. Yeah, that's what I'd say.

TAYLOR LAPOINTE: Yeah, I would just say lacrosse isn't all of you. Like don't let your sport define you. You play your sport because like Maddie said, you get to; it's just a part of you, and just use it as a vehicle to grow you as a person, and just be so grateful for every opportunity that you could even play, like, a sport.

MADDIE EPKE: I was going to say, just try and believe in yourself, and just work hard and good things will happen to you, and for teams that just put in the energy and effort and focus every day. So keep working hard.

Q. You guys get to play 60 more minutes of lacrosse. How much joy does that bring you guys?

MADISON TAYLOR: More time together. We made it to the last day, the very last day we could get to. That was our goal and we're so grateful for that. So we've got 60 more minutes left together no matter what. Couldn't be more happy.

Q. Looking forward, you guys are playing a UNC team that you've already played. What your mentality going into that game?

MADISON TAYLOR: I would say, it's kind of the same thing, kind of focusing on ourselves, and I do think when we focus on ourselves going into this game that is when we play our best, and just fighting for each other. We always talk about like having a lot of heart.

So when we did play the last time, we had a lot of heart. We were coming up with a lot of ground balls and draw controls and all those little hustle plays that you don't always see on the stat sheet. So trying to get into that mentality more, and just loving the hard fight because they are a great opponent. So we're just going to love that. It's going to be hard.

Q. In the first half, Aditi has pick-off on the goalie and dive-in goal and big celebration. What does her energy do for you guys?

TAYLOR LAPOINTE: I mean, she's a great player. That was insane. I think her bringing that energy back to our side, it really helped not even get us up as an attack but as a whole team, like bench and defense and all. I think she's a great energy driver for us and I've never been more grateful to play with someone, too.

Q. Congrats on matching Jared Bernhardt's seven points for the biggest game for a Floridian in a Final Four. (Players clapping) what do you credit your

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late-season surge?

TAYLOR LAPOINTE: I just credit my teammates, really, and people around me that love me so much. Like I genuinely wouldn't be where I was, like, without these even two girls. I've never been more grateful for the opportunity.

Q. Inside the final couple of minute, Jenika making a sprawl save for a pipe and after there were a few turnovers by Northwestern that almost prolonged the inevitable at that point Jenika, makes a save, takes it behind the crease, and almost pumps her fist down, like slow down. What do you think actually was the message there? Did you just need to calm down and focus?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I don't necessarily think it was slow down. It was, all right, take a breath. We're good. Let just clear the ball. They were obviously getting really desperate and making some huge plays. I think the game is in our hands. Let's just finish the job. I think that was her messaging.

Q. Someone who flies under the radar in terms of what she does on the field is Hannah Rudolph, but the production she put forth today, especially in the hustle plays and the ground balls, how does that encapsulate the type of player she is and the presence she has in the midfield?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: She's really done a great job for us this year. She's had a big year. Defensively, she's been really strong over the last month and a half.

I really feel like she broke out during spring break, especially in that game versus UNC, and then the next game versus Hopkins.

So we really have been relying on her since then, and she's done an amazing job, and is not afraid to step up in big moments.

Q. I feel like every year there's a lot of conversations about where to host the Final Four and kind of hosting the Final Four in places that have historically gotten good attendance numbers for this event. Coming to Chicago for this event for the first time, and then getting that crowd, what kind of message do you think that sends?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, I mean, I think it is a little bit challenging when the games are the times that they were today, and I'm hopeful that on Sunday, even more people can come out.

But I think the message that it sends is that the Midwest really does love the game of lacrosse. And you know, I think when you support things, then you see the results. And I think you're seeing the support of Northwestern today, and you know, people really love our program and want to come out and support it. But I think this is bigger than just us. I think this is, you know, a chance for, as you guys said before, little girls to see the game at the highest level, right.

The best players in the game were all on the field today, and so that's a really cool and rare opportunity, and I'm just so glad that people get to experience this for the first time beyond the East Coast. I'm so fortunate that I've got to experience it so many times, and I know how special it is. So just to spread that for the people in this area, it's a really cool thing, and I think people are pretty proud of it.

Q. At the end of the game, they made you shimmy. There anything that went into that? And then beyond that, that's kind of a moment that you're sharing a moment of joy with your players after winning, how do you instill this culture where you have three of your best players alongside you that are just glad to spend more time together?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, I mean, I just think it's every day, just teaching these young girls how to love each other and love each other in a way where you're unafraid and you just really put yourself out there and support each other through thick and thin.

And you know, I think the shimmy is just like a thing whenever we have a big win, that's what I've done for a very, very long time, since early in my career.

So you could hear the alums calling for it in the crowd, and it's just a little moment. Obviously I'm not big on attention. But it's just one thing that they want to see me do, so I do it for them.

Q. Your opponent, obviously you know Tim well, spent some time with you. What can you say about the year they had and the challenges they gave you today?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Unbelievable. Tim is truly an amazing coach, and I think the way that his kids have fought throughout the season and just battled in every game, they could have completely rolled over and given up after the first half, and I knew they wouldn't. They have never done that all season long. They have fought until the end, and truly been a great second half team.

And they have some fantastic players. Reagan O'Brien



has come to my camps since she was a very, very young girl. I have a camp very close to where she lives in Charles Town, so I have known her and her sister a very, very long time, as well. Just, you know, I just can't say enough about their team and their coaching staff. They truly did an amazing job this year, and I'm happy. I'm sure Tim's not happy to have lost the game because I think he has true belief in his team. But I think it's a monumental thing that he has made the Final Four in his fourth year at Hopkins. That's pretty amazing.

Q. After the first game today, it was inferred once or twice that North Carolina very much knows who it wants to play on Sunday. What do you make of something like that, as well as what's become a very fun head-to-head between yourselves and North Carolina?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, absolutely. We have a great rivalry. You know, I've been in their shoes before where you lose to someone, and you have a high level of motivation. We know that.

You know, we are not really -- as the girls said, we focus on ourselves, and you know, we have the opportunity to play on our home field in front of a big crowd, and we really want to give all of our whole heart to it, and we know we have a very strong opponent ahead of us, and a motivated opponent ahead of us, too.

But we are a motivated team, as well, and I think it will be a good battle.

Q. Earlier you mentioned the never give up mentality; how do you think your team exhibited the never give up mentality in response to the four goals?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I think it's just resiliency knowing that you can always make a play, and even if the tides have turned a little, all takes is one play or one person having each other's back to turn it back the other way. I think it's just that level of faith that gives our team the ability to not get rattled in those types of situations.

Q. I want to talk about the bench. You guys on the bench are always keeping it energizing throughout the whole game, even though the opponent is scoring, you're still dancing, no matter what music is playing, just keep dancing. What is the support like from the bench and how do they keep the energy like that?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: It's critical. You know, every person on our team has a significant role in our success, and you know, you have three girls sitting here that you get to talk to but there's so many that you know have made an impact, and just that goes to the love.

That's a team that -- the word "team" is not one or two people or three people. It's a full team. And if you can mobilize a group of 39, 40 girls in one direction, that's not an easy thing to do. I can tell you that.

But when you do it, it's a very powerful thing, and I think that energy on the bench is what you're seeing there.

Q. This is the first team with a home-field advantage in a Championship Game since 2004, and winning would be your 40th win at home. What would that mean to win the Championship out in Martin Stadium?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: It would be really cool. To have the home fans see the student athlete, the students, the supporters, the people that work at the university, the community, we really try to play for them every time we play.

We'll be proud no matter what happens on Sunday of our effort and how we carry ourselves, but if we could it would be a really cool thing for I think everyone in the community, as well.

Q. Sunday is going to be the last college game for a lot of your players. How do you coach into that moment and what advice do you give them?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: You know, I think the biggest thing is that you just try to play free. Play as free as possible, and try to leave your whole heart on the field for the people around you. I think that's all you can kind of control. Not every play is going to be perfect or go our way. But just kind of show what we're made of. Show what Northwestern Lacrosse is about, and give everything you have.

I think when we do that, we always compete well.

Q. When you look at Maddie Epke's progression, she's playing her best lacrosse by a pretty long shot at a pristine moment of this point in May.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: It's been pretty cool. Obviously I work with the draw squad. That's my thing. So I get to work with her every single day. I get to have a lot of conversations with her. And you know, I think early on in the season, it was a little bit of a hard transition, and just to see how comfortable she is now, how she carries us and how big-time she is. I mean, she was big time. She closed the game out for us with draw controls, and then that goal at the end, and just a massive game.

I think she just -- she loves this game. She wants to be a

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

coach. It's just really fun to work with people.

And I just have to put a plug in because Maddie, Maddie, Maddie combined had 19 draw controls today, the three Maddies.

So I think they are a pretty unbelievable squad, and I have a ton of fun working with them.

Q. Congrats on the win. Looking forward, what will you draw from in the regular season UNC game? Is it more about the experience and confidence, or are there a few things you picked up on that can be carried over?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, I mean, it was a while ago. It was in the end of March, and so there's been a lot of time. I think we've progressed, and I think UNC has also progress. Obviously they are very motivated. But I think there's always a lot of learning. I think some of it will be mental. Some of it will be tactical.

And yeah, I mean, I think just the fact that we did play each other is a really neat thing, and how we have this rivalry, and just having played them last year in the Championship Game, it's a pretty cool thing. So we're excited to, you know, welcome them to our home field again on Sunday, and you know, just see what happens. Fight as hard as we can.

Thanks to you all for coming out.

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