

# 2021 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Saturday, May 29, 2021

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

## Virginia Cavaliers

## Connor Shellenberger

## Alex Rode

### Media Conference



Virginia - 12, North Carolina - 11

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We have the student-athletes from Virginia.

**Q. Alex, what is it about this tournament and this setting that seems to bring out the best in your game?**

ALEX RODE: I don't know if it's anything about this tournament or anything in general. I think this tournament just gets everyone excited, and our defense and offense are just playing so well. So I think our team's just playing well in this tournament. It really allows me to see easy shots and have an okay day.

**Q. Alex, how cool is it tomorrow if you get a chance -- or Monday, to play against the state school of Maryland. I know you're from Timonium. How cool would that be?**

ALEX RODE: That would be a really awesome opportunity. I grew up a Maryland fan my whole life, and I'm originally from Timonium, Maryland. But either team we play, them or Duke, it would be cool to play Duke in the ACC, so either team would be a great opportunity for our team.

**Q. This one's for Connor. When you look at that sequence in the second quarter when you guys were able to dominate possession, just how significant do you think that sequence was where you guys were able to push it out? And how well do you think you guys handled playing with a lead like that?**

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: It was awesome having Petey LaSalla (inaudible) the way he did and Grayson Sallade picking up balls the way he was, kind of control the tempo, dictate the flow of the game a little bit, and they were able to put the ball in the back of the net. So that was

huge for our confidence going into halftime.

**Q. You guys played a lot of defense late in the game. What was that like for you knowing that giving up a goal could have meant overtime? Did the team's experience in close games, particularly in previous tournaments, help in that situation?**

ALEX RODE: Yeah, I think for anyone in that situation, it's a little nerve-racking, but I just had trust in our defense and trust in our offense that we could get in the goal, and our defense played great. That's always good in the back of the mind going into overtime that Petey LaSalla and our range are doing great at their job. It's scary, no doubt. I have a lot of faith in our team, and it's exciting at the same time.

**Q. This question is for either of you. Just having played UNC twice before, and when you guys went up at the half, what did you guys know that they would come back or not, and how did you guys keep grounded just knowing that it was still going to be a fight, just knowing this team so well?**

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Going into halftime, we had a little bit of a lead. Like you said, we played UNC twice already. We know they get up and down. We know they were going to go on a run. They're a great team. They're really well coached. You can't expect a team like that just to lay down.

We kind of had to keep our foot on the pedal, and just like you said, they ended up coming back, and we had to keep punching back in the fourth quarter. That's why it was such a great game.

**Q. Alex, in that last sequence, was the plan basically to be as physical as possible with North Carolina and just try to make sure that they did not -- they were not able to get an open look without having somebody right in their face or on their gloves?**

ALEX RODE: Yeah, I think the plan was to play our base defense but also crowd their shooters and not let them get a shot off. Our defensemen Cade, Kyle Kology, and



Castner are great at. A team like North Carolina that are so strong offensively and such a great team not to get a shot off in 20 seconds is really a testament to how good those guys played. It's really impressive.

**Q. What was it like for you guys in this kind of atmosphere, this crowd, playing with a full -- almost a full house, I guess?**

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: It was unreal. Despite the weather, there was a huge turnout. It's kind of cool you had almost like the student sections in high school, with the UVA on one side and Carolina on the other. Just the energy that the fans added was something that we haven't really experienced all year. So it was exciting.

**Q. Going off of that for you, Connor, this is your first time playing at a stage like this in your UVA career, and now to be part of a championship team, what is that going to mean to you? After having watched them in 2019 as a fan.**

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: It truly means everything. It's why you put so many hours in in the fall as a team and you do all the extra things that you do. It's our dream. Everyone on the team, we compete for this reason. So to have the chance to compete for a championship on Monday, it's why we're all here.

**Q. Alex, similar question to that one, but considering that you guys won the title in '19. Last year, obviously, we know got wiped out. How difficult a road has it been to get back to the championship game, and how much pride do you take in the fact that you've been able to do that?**

ALEX RODE: I think for any team it's a real difficult road just to get this far. I just feel very fortunate to be a part of this team and a part of UVA lacrosse with such a strong tradition. I'm very fortunate to have the ability to get there, but I'm very proud to be a part of this team and this program in my four years here.

**Q. What would winning a second title mean to you?**

ALEX RODE: It would be great to bring our title home to Virginia and have a title with this team. It's just as cool as the first, but definitely separate and awesome.

**Q. Alex, back in 2019 you had this similar situation. You played a Saturday, won the championship on Monday. What did you learn from that kind of quick turnaround? I mean, you guys had something similar with playing Duke on Thursday and Utah on Saturday. Are you going to change anything you did two years**

**ago to now, now in this situation?**

ALEX RODE: I don't know if I'll change anything. I'm just going to listen to our amazing trainer Reaves and our great strength coach Steve Cuccia, they'll tell me what to do to get ready. Just got to go on autopilot the next couple days and listen.

**Q. Connor, you guys have the luxury of yourself and Matt Moore both kind of playing a little bit of that facilitator role. What's it like having both you guys out there, and then how did you react when he was out of the lineup for a little bit today?**

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: It's nice to have both of us out there because we can kind of both do similar things. One of us can kind of play behind and one can play up top. We both kind of feed and shoot. It's kind of a relief for one another because, if one of us is gassed and can't make something happen, we can kind of toss it to the other one. What was the second part of your question again?

**Q. When he went down with injury in the game, how did you guys adjust?**

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Yeah, that was tough, obviously, to see him go down, but that's one of the things we pride ourself on is the depth we have on offense. So just different guys stepping up, Xander, Bertie, Garno, just the way that they played at the end of the first half was huge.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports