

2021 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Monday, May 31, 2021

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Virginia Cavaliers

Connor Shellenberger

Payton Cormier

Media Conference



Virginia 17, Maryland 16

Q. Connor, I know when you watched -- I'm guessing when you watched the championship in 2019, the thought crossed your mind that you might be part of a similar celebration one day. Now that that's become reality, what was that like?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Yeah, for it to become a reality is insane. It's what you dream of as a kid, and even going back to 2011 when they beat Maryland in the championship and being in the stands and seeing that celebration, 10 years fast forward and to be a part of it is unreal.

Q. Connor, Maryland was allowing fewer than 10 goals a game, hadn't given up more than 13 the entire season. What was UVA able to do that no one else could this season?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: I mean, give a lot of credit to Maryland. They have a great defense, and even just watching the Duke game on Saturday, we knew it was going to be a tough test. Duke has a great offense, and they essentially shut them down. Really it was just having a lot of belief, a lot of trust in one another and moving the ball.

We kind of have this stereotype as an offense that we play hero ball, but we really do whatever the defense dictates us to do. We took it as a challenge and we don't want to back down from Maryland's defense, we wanted to go right at them, so that was kind of our mindset going into today.

Q. Connor, Alex Rode just called you one of the best players he's ever seen. What does that mean to you and what does this championship mean to you?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: I mean, it means a lot,

especially coming from Rode. We get to battle every day, and how much better he makes us as shooters is -- we can't really describe it. We get out of game time and we've already seen the best goalie every day in practice. What he did in this tournament and as you saw with 10 seconds left, he makes the game-winning save. Alex Rode is about as clutch a lacrosse player as it gets. He's a winner.

Q. Payton, early on you guys scored mostly in transition but got for success in the six on six. What was the big difference in that shift and what was going through your head in the last 10 seconds?

PAYTON CORMIER: Yeah, you know, I think we did a good job slowing it down, getting a lead and holding on to it. We played a lot of defense, so we knew we couldn't really push transition the whole time because our defense was coming up big for a large -- like a large portion of that second half. And then obviously the last 10 seconds, just seeing that face-off out there, hoping they win it, everybody is crammed together on the bench and then losing it and seeing Rode make that huge stop with like five seconds left, that was pretty crazy.

Q. Payton, you were part of the team that won in 2019 but you were injured that season. What's it feel like for you to be out on the field, part of this scoring goals and really be a part of the championship?

PAYTON CORMIER: Yeah, this one definitely hits different. Being able to be out there, it's not discrediting being a part of a team not being able to play because you still helped that whole team be successful, but just being out there with especially our offensive group and being a part of that, there's not much I would change.

Q. For both of you guys, this wasn't the smoothest season. Certainly you had that Syracuse loss and Coach Tiffany said that early in the year his friends were telling him, nobody will remember March if you play well in May. How much did you take that message to heart that it was going to be how you ended the year that was going to matter?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Yeah, we definitely had

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our struggles early in the year, but I think it goes back to that leadership and that belief we have as a team. It's so cliché, it's so cheesy, but guys like John Fox, Dox Aitken, Jared Conners, this is why they came back for their fifth year because they know what happens in May and they now how a team can progress over the season.

We definitely had our ups and downs. The two 'Cuse losses in the ACC was tough this year, but whatever it takes to win in May, and that's kind of how it is. You get in the playoffs and it's one and done. We're just so fortunate to have that leadership.

Q. Connor, you've talked about it before, but just representing Charlottesville at this stage and wanting to do this at this level, what is it like now kind of realizing this dream?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Yeah, I mean, I feel like I've said it a thousand times, but it's just crazy. Looking up when we won and seeing my parents in the stands, it's about as good as it gets. All the sacrifices that they made for me, and even just driving me to lacrosse when I was a little kid and letting me have that dream. I can't thank them enough for supporting me and giving me this opportunity, and then to do it with this group of guys, these coaches, it's literally what you dream of.

Q. Connor, given the season you had to sit out last year, how much sweeter does it make you you were able to cap your first season on the field at Virginia with a performance like you had today?

CONNOR SHELLENBERGER: Definitely pretty satisfying. I remember redshirting and you have a thousand thoughts in your head like what are people going to think, are you good enough to play here, and then kind of to validate yourself but also the rest of your team and this program and where we're going with this thing, it's definitely pretty cool.

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