

2022 DIV III NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Sunday, May 29, 2022

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Rentschler Field

Union Athletics

Derek Witheford

Kieran McGovern

Keaton McCann

Media Conference



is something we're going to remember for the rest of our lives. Obviously right now things didn't bounce our way today, but still very proud of this team, and I'll be proud until the day I die to say I was a part of this team.

KEATON McCANN: What we've done this season for this team and the guys in that locker room will stick with them forever. That's something we cherish and will keep with us, like Kieran said, until the day we die. More than that, we left a legacy at this school that I think will be remembered for a very long time.

You guys had great fan support today. How great was it to see the student body rally behind you guys and really get excited about lacrosse at Union?

KIERAN McGOVERN: Yeah, we knew going into the game we were going to have a lot of support and that might have been an advantage for us. It was good to see. Locally there's a lot of people, like Union is kind of in the middle of Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, so we knew we were going to have a lot of support, and it was a cool thing to be a part of.

KEATON McCANN: It means the world to us to have that type of support from everyone. We know when we see them after the game, too, that support will still be there, so we're thankful to have them.

Q. What was the talk about at halftime? What was the sort of emotional state at that point?

KIERAN McGOVERN: We did what we needed to do in the first half, so the message was let's just keep doing what we're doing, not let them back into the game, control what we can control. Obviously things didn't go our way in the second half, but we definitely are proud of the effort we put forth in the first half and definitely throughout the whole game.

KEATON McCANN: Yeah, we knew they were going to come out strong. A team like that, as many times as we've seen them, we know what they're capable of, and we knew we had to be ready for anything that they threw at us.

RIT 12, Union 10

DEREK WITHEFORD: Very happy with the way we competed all year and very proud of these guys. This is probably the most competitive Division III has been with the amount of fifth- and sixth-year players that are playing, and being the National Championship game is no runner-up trophy, so very happy we made it this far. I think we gave RIT probably their best run for their money all year. I'm very proud of this group.

Q. Just the start you had to this game, scoring first, getting a big first-half lead, how confident were you going into the half that you could keep that rolling, and what did RIT do in the second half that slowed you guys down?

KEATON McCANN: I felt great, but like everything in this game, it comes and goes. There are waves, and we need to weather the wave that we knew they were going to go on. Credit to them for stepping on the gas. Felt good to go up, but we knew it was going to be a battle until the end.

KIERAN McGOVERN: Yeah, just to add to that, their zone defense, you've got to give credit where it's due, and that was definitely difficult for us in the second half, and their goalie played a good game, so kudos.

Q. You both came back to play for the extra year and got all the way to the National Championship game. Can you describe your emotions even though you fell a game short of the Championship?

KIERAN McGOVERN: Yeah, it's still something that we're very proud of. Obviously it stings right now, but I was just talking to Keaton in the hallway, and this whole experience



Q. When you went down late in the third quarter, what was the atmosphere like on the sideline? What were you telling each other? You guys were still fighting, diving after ground balls, still being physical. What were you telling yourselves to keep that attitude and energy up?

KIERAN McGOVERN: Yeah, winning as many games as we have this year, just in as many games as we were in this year, you see a lot of different situations, and being down is definitely -- we had seen that before, even in our playoff run alone.

We keep the energy high. We constantly are saying you can't get too low, can't get too high. It's just keep the same effort, stop the run, and hoping things go our way eventually.

KEATON McCANN: Yeah, we were just waiting for that one moment, that one swing, and I think that might have come a little too late. But emotions on that bench after that run they went on, we knew what we had to do. We were confident, and we just had to keep playing our game.

Q. You guys talked a lot about legacy you hope to leave at this program, and I think part of the RIT comeback is they've been here before, they've done this before. For all the guys in this program, how important is it for them to get this experience, to maybe get the opportunity to come back here and do this again?

KEATON McCANN: Yeah, that's what we're hoping. We have a great class under us, freshmen, sophomores and juniors that are coming up that have stepped into huge roles, and I couldn't be more proud and look forward to watching them play and seeing what they can achieve, as well.

KIERAN McGOVERN: Yeah, and getting to this point is a huge step for the program. Even though we didn't win it, we hope these kids now are motivated and will come back and we'll see more of those same results for years to come. That's all we can hope is we leave this place better than we found it.

Q. What are you going to remember the most about this season, this incredible run that you've had over the last few months?

KIERAN McGOVERN: I'll remember how many different guys we had contributing and how bought in this team was. That was something special throughout the entire year, something that got us to this point, and when I look back on this team, that's definitely what I'll remember most.

KEATON McCANN: Yeah, I love every single one of the guys in that locker room. We just had fun together. You talk about great teams, when they come together, they pick one another up no matter what the circumstances, and we have that. Every second with those guys was awesome.

Q. Kieran touched on it a little bit that you have kind of a cosmopolitan squad. You have New England guys from all over the place, New York guys. How did you go about building that?

DEREK WITHEFORD: Recruiting. I don't really have an answer for you. The Massachusetts, Connecticut guys, Westchester, they know about Union, so it might be a little bit easier to recruit, but we're doing our best to find the best players from anywhere across the United States. It seems like we might have to get into Canada after this game.

Q. Just wanted to ask a bit about the first half, you guys were peppering them with shots and you kept them out of transition. It seemed like you weren't able to get quite as much off zone obviously playing a role in that a little bit and then they got out in transition. How important were those two elements in deciding this?

DEREK WITHEFORD: I think it was very key. I think we had some bad turnovers offensively that led to some transition goals and a couple subbing miscues that led to some easy goals and got them confident and back in the game. But honestly I think the goalie won the game for them in the second half. He caught fire, and I would guess he had close to 20 saves in this game. 16 saves, so he made some really good ones in the second half.

Q. You mentioned going to Canada, but what do you think you have to do to finally beat those guys? Obviously you keep coming close.

DEREK WITHEFORD: I like the formula that we have. We seem to be doing it better than a lot of other teams. That's a great team. That's a back-to-back National Championship team.

I'm not going to reinvent the wheel and try to change everything that we're doing. I think we just need to attack a little bit of the zone better. I thought we cleared the ball today very well, which was in our game plan. We had two penalties where they scored two goals, which was key in that game.

So I think we just need to put together a little bit more of a complete game, offensively and of transition defense, and I think we're in a good spot.



Q. What was your message to your fifth-year seniors as they walked off the field, those five years that they gave this program, what was your message to them?

DEREK WITHEFORD: I just told them I loved them. I didn't know what else to say.

Q. Coach, obviously the hope and expectation would be for this group to get back here, but that's so much easier said than done. What do you believe you have to do right now and just moving forward as a coach just to get that group with a fire under them ready to make this run again?

DEREK WITHEFORD: Yeah, we can't be complacent. The league we're in is a bear. The out-of-league conference is a bear. We're going to have to play Union lacrosse and keep showing up and grinding the stone and hopefully get one more crack at RIT again, but we've just got to take it a game at a time and keep working, showing up.

Q. The success you had this year, expectations a little higher with the strong class you have going into next year? Have you thought about that?

DEREK WITHEFORD: Maybe, but if you look at who we just lost, I don't know if expectations could be higher. We're going to have to rebuild, and we've got a lot of new faces, so I'm looking forward to that.

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