

# 2022 DIV II NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Sunday, May 29, 2022

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Rentschler Field

## Tampa Spartans

### J.B. Clarke

### Matthew Beddow

### Blake Ulmer

Media Conference



season, and so have the other two D poles and D middies that we have, and I'm so grateful to have those guys in front of me because my numbers wouldn't be good without those guys. Very grateful for who I have in front of me.

**Q. Blake and Matt, this run, first national title, what made this run unique and this team unique from your perspective?**

MATTHEW BEDDOW: I would say going back to what Coach said, our senior leadership. Obviously me and Blake are juniors, so we're upper class and we're seeing how the program has changed but those seniors really embraced it and I felt we helped the seniors embrace the change and head in a new direction, which how it turned out is pretty great.

So very happy and thankful for our seniors and obviously coach Clark.

BLAKE ULMER: Like what Matthew said, our seniors couldn't have done a better job. There was a massive culture change this year, and the seniors really helped us figure out those different steps to take throughout the year.

We couldn't have done it without our seniors, absolutely.

**Q. Describe the feeling; you've got the nets in your hats and postgame celebration, how great is it to be national champions but also finish the season undefeated?**

BLAKE ULMER: I can't stop crying. That's all I've got. Ever since I was a little kid watching every Final Four, it's just surreal. Seeing my parents cry and hug them and all that. It's just been an unbelievable experience.

MATTHEW BEDDOW: Me and Blake are roommates, so we spend a lot of time on the couch just talking about this moment right here, and it's better than you ever could imagine. So it's a pretty great feeling.

**Q. Blake, you mentioned you dreamed of this. Transferring from Syracuse, is this something that you had in mind when you came to Tampa, and how did it**

J.B. CLARKE: First of all, I think it's important on this weekend to honor all those who fought for us and paid the ultimate sacrifice. We forget when we're playing in a game like this that it's Memorial Day. So I think it's important that we do that.

Quite a run by this group of young men. They embraced everything about my family, myself, the new coaches. People are going to try and give me too much credit for what happened. I really want to place all the spotlight and emphasis on especially this senior class. They had a lot to work for and a lot to prove, and they embraced everything about what we tried to do.

All the credit really needs to go to our senior class. Obviously these are two of the best players in the country, and they obviously had a lot to do with it. But I think they'd agree that this senior class was remarkably special.

**Q. Matt, what changed in that second -- you only held them to one goal in the first quarter, but you go on a 6-0 run. What helped defensively to help shut them out for that spurt?**

MATTHEW BEDDOW: I think following the game plan that the coaches laid out was a big deal. I felt like they got a few lucky bounces in the second quarter that kind of went their way and the bounces went our way in the second half which helped us shut them down and hold them to such a low goal turnout at the end of the game, which really helped out.

**Q. Blake, how important is Matt to your defense?**

BLAKE ULMER: He's the National Player of the Year. That's a huge piece, right? He's been phenomenal all



**live up to your expectations a few years ago when you made that choice?**

BLAKE ULMER: Yeah, totally. When I came here I knew that it was a very good program, and it's been nothing short of spectacular, and we've just gotten better and better every single year. Yeah, it's just been amazing. It's been a great move.

**Q. Coach, I know you don't want to take too much of the credit, but what about this group helped you kind of instill your philosophy, your game plans, and just everything that went into this undefeated season?**

J.B. CLARKE: Yeah, believe it or not, I spent a lot of time thinking about that. Maturity has a lot to do -- "maturity" and "eager" are the two words that keep coming to my mind.

It takes a really mature man to want change and want new things and want a different direction. This group -- when I first had a Zoom call with them last summer, last August, I could tell right then and there that they were eager for something new. Not that it's the right thing and the old thing was the wrong thing, but it was something knew that they really wanted.

Their maturity going through some of the changes that we had to make, and nothing was major. I don't light the world on fire or anything. It's just a little bit more accountability.

Their ability to hold each other accountable I think is directly correlated to their maturity, and they started doing that as soon as we started making it a point of emphasis for them.

The old cliché that team-led programs are the ones that win championships and coach-led programs are the ones that don't, and this group is team led and team disciplined and team -- their maturity is just amazing. I hope that answers it. I don't know, I said a lot, but I probably didn't say anything.

**Q. You've been through this a couple times now, a few times. What made this run and this celebration different for you?**

J.B. CLARKE: Geez, I don't know. It's too new right now. I guess the run is like any other, I think, in that it's week to week. You know, you're not even done with the last game, and you're already worried about the next game. You're like, well, we've got to rest him because he might have to do this next week if we advance, or don't get him hurt, or what are we going to do on Monday, and how are we ever going to beat them.

It really is a blur, and it goes week to week once you're into the conference tournament, and we played Seton Hill and then our conference tournament and then LR and then Limestone and then Mercy. Sunday to Sunday is a really long time, and it goes by like that.

From that standpoint it's kind of a blur.

Last week was hard, coaching against that team, preparing against that team. I felt like is it cursed -- I didn't feel that way because obviously I want to win with these guys, but I kind of feel like I could have had a Limestone here and a Tampa there because I still love those kids. I wanted to beat their brains in, they wanted to beat my brains in. So that was very unusual, I think.

But my current team, couldn't have been more supportive throughout it, and you saw the way they showed up and played a week ago. It was something else.

**Q. These championship runs, you've been through a few of them with Limestone. What did you take from them? What did you learn from those runs that you were able to apply to this team? Different program but what were you able to take and bring with you?**

J.B. CLARKE: Focus on yourself more than on the opponent. We as coaches sit there and we watch hours -- I forget Mercy's record, but we had 18 films on Mercy, so I could have spent all week watching film on Mercy, and what we really tried to focus on was on us more. Obviously you need to know what Mercy is going to do or whoever your opponent is.

But do what you do, continue to do it better. Our practice yesterday was, I don't know, maybe an hour and five minutes, hour and 10 minutes. 10 minutes of stretch, probably 50 minutes just working on us, and maybe five or seven minutes on what Mercy does.

I think I've learned that you have to be playing your best on this day in order to win, in order to do that you need to focus on yourselves and continue to get better in this three-week period.

**Q. All season Matt was terrific. Today just describe him, what makes him so good as a player and especially during that spurt when you guys scored six straight and held them to one goal --**

J.B. CLARKE: Yeah, you're bringing me all this new -- I didn't even know we scored six straight. That's pretty good, I guess, huh? It's all coaching. No.

Matthew is like a big kid. He loves playing lacrosse. He's that guy that bounces around at practice. Doesn't matter how hard it is, he's going. It's very, very rare that you have to kick him in the rear end and get him going, even at practice, weights, whatever it is. He just loves playing. Coach Ryan Sullivan, who was here when I got here, and thank God he stayed, he has done a phenomenal job at that end of the field getting those guys to not only do all the dirty work but enjoy doing it. Does that make sense? If you're going to dig a ditch, you might as well enjoy digging a ditch.

Playing defense at this level is really hard, and it's a lot of dirty work. Matthew and all those other guys, they dug in, and Sully brings out the best in those kids. It's really fun to watch Sully work.

**Q. Another guy that had a big day was Cole. He's a guy that came back from injury last year, transferred from Penn State. How happy are you with his performance this year but especially today when it mattered leading you guys to a National Championship?**

J.B. CLARKE: You know, it's an unusual situation. Right before the time that Cole decided to come to Tampa, he tore his ACL. In the fall I didn't see him play. I didn't know him at Penn State. I was at Limestone, I wasn't worried about Penn State's midfield. So I didn't know much about him. You see him down there, he's hobbling around. It's like, is he ever going to play for us? So you don't count on -- I don't count on guys when they're injured. If they play, awesome. So we tried to build around that.

And then it was a slow process of getting him back. It wasn't really until March when we could get him on some extra man. He started to take more and more runs in practice, then he started to playing full field. The thing about Cole even with that knee, he's a heck of a defender, and you wouldn't think that. He doesn't look like it. What did he have today? He had four again today? I think he had three or four last week. You gang up on all those guys and he comes Cole Willard. It has to be a little frustrating for the opposing coach, I've got to imagine.

A lot of maturity from Cole. Obviously he's a little bit older, being a grad student playing at Division I level three, four years whatever it is with the COVID stuff. So he brought an element of maturity and moxie, a little moxie, and he was like the big brother out there. He calmed everybody down, including me, and made eight goals in two games. That's something else, semifinal and final. I didn't even know he had four goals today.

**Q. Talk a little bit about your long tradition of coaches**

**coming out of Southern Connecticut in all sports. Maybe talk about your days at southern a little bit.**

J.B. CLARKE: Well, I never played or coached at Southern. I was actually coaching at Wilton High School while attending Southern Connecticut. Guy Whitten at Wilton High School and Tom Fujitani was the football coach, asked me when I came back from Roanoke if I would work with them. I'm one of those very fortunate few, and I think you guys probably are, too, it was probably about 20 seconds I had the whistle around my neck and I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I didn't know until then. So really those two men set me on this path.

But Connecticut lacrosse was awesome to me, Connecticut football was awesome to me. The people, I saw people in the stands I haven't seen in 25 years. It was really special to come back to Connecticut at this time of year. It was nice to come back to Connecticut. Being in Tampa now, it's different. So thank you, yeah. Connecticut has a lot to do with who I am.

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