

2022 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

Monday, May 30, 2022

East Hartford, Connecticut, USA

Rentschler Field

Cornell Big Red

Connor Buzcek

Gavin Adler

CJ Kirst

Media Conference



Maryland 9, Cornell 7

CONNOR BUZCEK: To start with, how proud I am of this group. They've fought, they've scrapped, they've clawed. They've gotten better every day. They've committed throughout this process, and you saw throughout the course of the day, they got better as the day went on. That was probably one of our best quarters of the year in that fourth quarter, and that was against a stellar Maryland team that deserves everything that they get.

I'm so proud to be associated with this group. I know the brand of Cornell lacrosse that they play makes the long tradition of Cornell lacrosse very, very -- everybody is supportive of that. It honors all that's come before us.

There's a certain way about playing at a place like Cornell and there's a certain expectation of how you play the game, and these guys honor that well. Again, didn't go our way today, but proud of the way they continued to fight, proud of the belief, the resiliency that they continued to show, and know that the clock ran out on us today, but hopefully we're on the cusp of building something pretty special here moving forward.

Q. Gavin, Coach mentioned it's one of your best quarters of the season; how proud are you of holding Maryland to their lowest scoring output of the season and finishing strong to give yourselves a chance?

GAVIN ADLER: Yeah, just really proud of our guys. We fought, and that's our identity. Win or lose, no matter the result, probably would have cried the same way in the locker room, just knowing that our time is done regardless. That's really what hurt the most, not really the result, just seeing guys who are going out the door. I'm lucky enough

to come back, but definitely proud of our effort today offensively and defensively.

Q. You guys watched Maryland receive the trophy. I saw everyone looking at that. Being on this stage, does that increase the hunger to come back? Does that give you confidence coming into next year?

GAVIN ADLER: Absolutely. It's everything.

CJ KIRST: Yeah, definitely. We know what it takes to get here, and seeing that moment I guess pushes us even more, especially in the offseason. We're just super lucky to be in this position that we are where Gavin has a year left and I have three. I just couldn't be more grateful for the position that we are, and we're just super excited to, I guess, get back to work.

GAVIN ADLER: Yeah, huge step forward for the program. It's a domino effect. Now that I've been here, he's been here, that's three years a generation of players can pass on, do what it takes and show the young guys this is who we are.

Q. For both of the players, what was the difference in the fourth quarter?

GAVIN ADLER: I mean, I can't really speak to the beginning of the game, but towards the end of the game, I knew we were just hanging on. We knew this was our last time regardless, no matter what the score was. We had to leave it all out there. I think you really saw that come out of us in the fourth quarter. We just ran out of time.

CJ KIRST: Yeah, at the end of the third you come to the sideline, you've got everyone giving you a hug saying we've got this, keep your head, up, and that just pushed us. For all the work we put in this year, there was 15 minutes left, especially for the seniors, 15 minutes of their career, and we gave it all we got.

Q. Piggy-backing off that, CJ, in that final frame, did you feel yourselves pick up another gear? Seemed like Maryland was gassed to finish that thing.



CJ KIRST: Yeah, definitely. All year, we may not have had the best start but we always finished strong. We gave it all we got. That last 15 minutes we were definitely really motivated, and the unfortunately we came up short, but those 15 minutes we pushed ourselves, and yeah.

Q. What was said at the end of the third quarter that led you guys to go on that run to make the game interesting in the fourth quarter?

GAVIN ADLER: Nothing really was said. We just knew, like this is who we are. It was our last time together. It wasn't a pump-up speech or a motivational quote. We just looked each other in the eyes and we knew we were going to claw back in this thing.

Q. What does it say about this team that you're down 9-2 but you do come back like that, you do fight and show that resiliency, especially in that adversity on this stage?

CJ KIRST: That's just our culture. Ever since we stepped -- everyone on our team stepped foot on campus, you're going to give it everything you've got, no matter if it's going to a lift or you're running conditioning. Yeah, every time we're out on the field we don't take it for granted. Yeah, we gave it all we got.

GAVIN ADLER: Yeah, just not really looking at the scoreboard, just the next-play mentality, game-to-one mentality, and the rest would take care of itself. We just came up short.

Q. Coach, you fell behind 7-2 by the half. Seemed like there was a little problem, tried to recuperate, and also you created a run the last quarter. Your player John Piatelli is your top attacker, the top scorer on the team. He was missing in action today. Was something wrong with him? Was it anything that you could share with us, or do you think in a way was there anything he would be better, he would make a difference in the outcome of this game?

CONNOR BUZCEK: Yeah, again, I think it's the beauty of our offense is that everybody is involved. Everybody gets a fair shake at it, and we see what's working and we work from there. That defense, we could tip our cap to them. Obviously holding us to two goals through the half and three into the third quarter was our lowest output of the year, so they certainly did some things that challenged us.

But once we started sharing the ball and playing team offense, you saw the spark in the fourth, and John got going and obviously CJ got us going early. Hughey got in the action, Spencer Wirtheim. I think for the seven goals

we scored, they were pretty well distributed.

It's a great defense. There's not a whole lot to take advantage of. So we had to certainly just make plays, and a few guys settled in. Again, today wasn't John's most impressive performance maybe on the stat sheet, but he did a lot for us. He continues to command a lot of respect. He manages situations as well as any.

For us he's a guy that we lean on, and he's the one that helped us spark this run. Obviously scores one at the end that gets disallowed and then scores another one. A guy that we trust inherently to do everything that we need done. So even though his output maybe on the score sheet didn't look like it, still proud of the way John led us today and did a lot of great things.

Q. Do you get a large amount of satisfaction out of the fact that you out-shot them, you went toe-to-toe with one of the best teams in the country, and you held them under 10 goals? You kind of made them sweat at the end; what level of satisfaction do you get out of the overall performance, not just the end of the fourth?

CONNOR BUZCEK: Sure. You know, I think in this sport there's no moral victories. You don't walk away feeling good because you made it tough on them. We believed coming into this thing we were going to win this thing. We believed that top to bottom.

That's a heck of a team. They do a lot of things great on tape, but we thought we had the ability to beat that team. With that being said, they were awesome. They managed our offense really well. I thought our defense played as well as they possibly could. The game plan was outstanding. I thought we competed at the face-off X, we made a team that doesn't make mistakes make mistakes, and that was part of what we were hoping to do was press them to those limits, get them in uncomfortable situations that we could start to capitalize on.

Again, I think the thing we talk about a lot in our program is about the inputs and not the outputs. It's about how you show up and the things that you can control, and I thought our guys did that.

From the start of the game to being down five goals, six goals in the game, and never losing faith, and I think you saw that.

The thing that I am most proud about of this group is not that they made Maryland sweat for a little bit there, but they just never lost the belief, the focus, the enthusiasm, the effort, and you saw it over the course of that game. The fact that that team played two games in three days and

were up in the course of the game brings a smile to my face and I know many Cornell lacrosse alums.

Q. One of the things that seemed to spark you guys in the fourth quarter was a ride that looked a lot more aggressive. You were really pressing forward. I'm sure some of that was the need to find some more possessions with time running down. Would you have considered going to a more aggressive ride earlier to try and create a spark that way as you guys needed to run?

CONNOR BUZCEK: Certainly hindsight it looks like there was some potential for that. I think going into the game, you're hard pressed to be super aggressive on the ride because they're so good at getting the ball up and out. You're trying to manage transition as much as you are trying to ride, and sometimes you get lost in the middle there and you start giving away some easy ones. Certainly that was a team we were hoping to not give them any of those opportunities, to make them work for everything, and truly all nine goals I felt like we made them earn.

Obviously we had some success when we had to get a little aggressive there. Maybe that will work for longer, but that's a scary team in transition with a lot of guys that handle the ball really well. So you want to try to manage the flow as well as you can, and I thought we did a pretty good job of that.

Q. What did you tell your players in the locker room following the game, and what is the one thing you'll take away from this season going into next year?

CONNOR BUZCEK: Following the game, just talked about how proud we are of the way this group has come along. It's been a long two years. There's been heartache and adversity and then there's been the most incredible moments with this team to share that field today and play Memorial Day Monday.

For us, I'm just proud of the progress this group has made. It would have been easy to complain and cry in our soup when things didn't break our way and when we were in tough spots and guys were deciding whether or not to withdraw from school last year, and coming back this year there was a lot of reasons that we weren't going to be as good as we could be.

We could have come back and talked about all the reasons that we're inexperienced, and we lost a great group of players in that senior class that graduated over those two years, and they didn't. They never once looked for an excuse, they just looked for the solution. They looked for the next opportunity to make a play. They looked for the

next way to get better.

That group took who was in that locker room, and every one of those guys committed to the plan of just getting better every day. Again, that's what makes me most proud of our effort today and throughout the course of the year.

I thought Saturday up to Saturday was our best performance of the year. Today obviously there's parts that Maryland makes it really tough on you. By the fourth quarter, that was the best lacrosse we had played all year. If you're peaking at the right time that means your guys are committed to improving at everything.

Just walking away from today, what I told them is that I'm proud, I'm proud of what they did, I'm proud of how hard they fought, I'm proud of the leadership within that group.

And then in terms of moving forward, we've built a foundation. We've built a foundation. Cornell lacrosse is -- we stand on the shoulders of giants at a place like that, and truly I think we're back to where we need to be in terms of culturally. You heard our guys talking about it, and it brought a smile to my face just hearing them echo the sentiments that we think are important to our program. To hear them talk about the resiliency, and regardless of the scoreboard, regardless of the situation, you show up and you compete and you care for your teammates, and you saw that today. I think they put it on display.

We talked about it over the last two years being a renaissance, being an opportunity to rebuild, to really get back to the basics, philosophically talk about who we wanted to be, and then when it's time that the rubber hits the pavement, it's time to go, and they did just that.

I think they truly set the foundation for this program moving forward, and there's a lot of young guys in that locker room for how great our senior class was and some of the studs that we're going to lose, there's a lot of really young guys in that locker room that are just getting started, and so I'm excited for what that senior class built and the belief that they built within our locker room, and now it's entrusted to us to keep building on where we were today.

Q. A part of that foundation, the rebuild, do you feel like this was kind of ahead of schedule, now that the season is over and you can reflect on things?

CONNOR BUZCEK: Yeah, to be honest, I didn't -- if you would have asked me on February 1 are you going to play on Memorial Day, I don't think I could confidently say yes. But also we hadn't played on Memorial Day in 15 years.

Again, I think that's the beauty of this thing, where I don't

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

think at any point in time I could have told you how good we were or how bad we were. I always just said we were getting better. We saw that out of this group. They had that mentality. They had that laser focus that even when we were 10-1, no one was content. No one was just okay with being good. Everybody wants to be great, and I think that's truly a marker of success within our program because when you have guys like that, nothing is too small to care about. Nothing is too small to try to win.

That nature brings you to opportunities like today.

Q. In the postgame handshake line, Coach Tillman really made a point of telling you how he approached this situation when he was in the past. As a first-year coach how do you move forward, and does making this game competitive at the end, does that help you when you're thinking about building for the future?

CONNOR BUZCEK: Yeah, you know, Coach Till is great with us, between myself and Jordan. He's always there and passing on advice, and obviously he's at the very top of this game, and Memorial Day has become a fixture on his calendar.

He's great; I appreciate all of his advice.

Certainly for us, coming through today, I think, again, sometimes this stage can be too big when you're a little too young. It can be overwhelming with the TVs and the cameras and the interviews and all that comes along with Memorial Day.

But I'm proud of this group, that it didn't ever feel that way. There was a laser focus about them, and again, it's no different than how we've gone about everything this year, but I've been really proud of the maturity of this group and specifically in the young guys.

So I think this is a jumping-off point. Certainly when we talk about things, we don't talk about things in terms of goals and trophies and end points. We just want to get better tomorrow, because if we talk about Memorial Day starting tomorrow, we just wasted 364 days. So our hope is as soon as we turn the page from this and we let this hurt a little bit that it's back to work.

The beauty of this is in the journey. You want to hold trophies, but I hope that's not the pinnacle of this is that's where we get to and then what. That's a part of this journey, and I'm lucky to be going through it with my staff and the guys on our team.

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