

# 2025 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

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Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Gillette Stadium

## Cornell Big Red Connor Buczek

## CJ Kirst

## Wyatt Knust

## Hugh Kelleher

Media Conference



Cornell 11, Penn State 9

CONNOR BUCZEK: Proud of our group, even though pockets not as pretty as we would like but it's about surviving advancing right now. Proud of the ground ball effort throughout the course of the game. Our execution, the little details, specifically riding the clear and really defensively closing the door when we needed to get our offense going and finding our footing and playing together. So incredible effort by our entire group and excited to have the opportunity to continue to compete on Monday.

**Q. Hugh, can you describe your game, and particularly the third goal, which was so important to stem their momentum after they scored three straight in the fourth?**

HUGH KELLEHER: Sure. Thank you for the question. Mike Long made a great play there, found me on the back side. Had a bit of space and was able to put the ball in the back of the net, and all the credit goes to everyone on the field at all times, especially CJ, Mikey, Goldy, they do a great job of drawing all that attention and it creates opportunities for the other guys to make plays.

CJ KIRST: I think at the start of the game, we were playing our game. It might not have showed on the scoreboard, but I know we were trusting each other and playing within a system that maybe the ball doesn't go in the back of the net like it does usually for us and showing the scoreboard, but we knew every time we got in the huddle that we were playing our game and we were comfortable and our defense was doing a good job holding them down. So that's why it was a tight game to start and continued from

there. Yeah, we were just trusting each other from that start.

**Q. Dooley was a stabilizing force for you guys. How important is he to your success?**

WYATT KNUST: Yeah, sure, he's a huge part of our defense, I would say. He's the loudest person down there and always communicating and makes a huge impact. Just from a confidence standpoint, he's always the loudest one out there. Makes some big plays in the middle of the field, and he's been a great player for us all season, and his communication is unmatched, and that doesn't show up on the stat sheet and it makes a huge impact on the field.

**Q. Can you guys talk me through what the halftime conversations were like down 5-4? I know you haven't been down much at halftime this season. What were the conversations about how to get back into this game?**

CJ KIRST: Yeah, we felt pretty comfortable at that point, being down by one. There's a lot of game left. We trust each other and we believe in each other, and I think that was the conversations we were having in the locker room from top down. You know, everyone was saying, this is our game and we believe in each other and we're going to get this done.

Similar to last week, being down and playing from behind, we had that trust and everyone had that look in their eye that we were going to get it done. Credit to the coaches for making sure we all believe in each other and that we were going to get it done.

**Q. How do you describe the comfort level that you developed after saving the first four shots you see?**

WYATT KNUST: It was good to settle in and get the first couple. Coming off a tough game from last week, I wanted to make an impact early in the game. It doesn't come from pressing and trying too hard to save the ball. I felt relaxed. Our defense was playing great, being aggressive and not giving them easy looks and I just tried to settle in and I saw the first couple.



But really, our short 60 middies and our poles stepped up and locked them down for the whole game and didn't give them many great opportunities.

**Q. Was it changing or picking up the rhythm of the game early in the faceoffs that changed and started to fall your way or did something switch in the second quarter to drive the possession?**

CONNOR BUCZEK: It was just staying the course, even though we were not getting the looks or finishing the looks as frequently as we would have liked to. We want to be poised and play six-man offense and share the ball. They are an excellent defense. They put a lot of pressure on you. Their goalie made some nice saves early. For us, it was about waiting for that explosion, waiting for that opportunity.

Again, this is a poised group that's been through a lot and a lot of leadership that allows to you just keep going and trust that at some point, it's going to open up for you, and when it did, we were able to cash in.

**Q. We've talked a lot about that senior leadership this season. What does it mean to the team to have teammates like each other and to have teammates like Ryan and Andrew who maybe don't get all of the credit but are always there in those important moments?**

CONNOR BUCZEK: Something that we preach in our program is the depth of the leadership will ultimately determine our success level, and when you have guys that are captains that are non-captains that play, that don't play, that play big minutes, that play small minutes, and they call care the same and take the same ownership and hold that line in the standard every single day, it makes the program very special.

We are fortunate to have an incredible group of young men that have bought into that process and given all of themselves to make this team successful, and it's given us an opportunity to win a National Championship on Monday.

**Q. The two points that Brendan had in that surge in the third quarter, how much did that energize you, and when you go in and see a celebration where guys put this pole in like a sword, don't see that every day. Just how energizing is that?**

WYATT KNUST: He was a spark for us in the second half, getting a goal, getting an assist, great feed to Goldstein. But he's been making plays all year in the middle of the field, picking up tough ground balls, and he's been able to make an impact on the offensive end. When our

defenders, short stick middies are scoring goals and getting points, we know it's going to help our team out a lot and really make a difference in the game today.

HUGH KELLEHER: Definitely whenever Brendan is winding up, it's great for the offense. It gives us the confidence and the momentum shift to keep going and find our stride offensively.

**Q. (No mic).**

CJ KIRST: It was a cool feeling but the conversations we had in the locker room is, we are here for Monday and all eyes for Monday and we are, all excited about the opportunity to compete for a National Championship. That's one of our goals starting the year and starting summer, and we are just excited for the opportunity on Monday.

**Q. Can you speak to the environment, what it was like to play here in Gillette Stadium?**

HUGH KELLEHER: I thought it was a great environment. We had the whole big red line behind us and cheering us on and when the momentum started shifting, it gave us even more juice to keep doing and close the game out.

**Q. Coach told the broadcast team yesterday that the regular season game doesn't have much effect on this, but when they made their run in the fourth quarter, was there anything about knowing you needed to make a play to stop the momentum that crept in?**

WYATT KNUST: Yeah, we knew we had to hold strong on the defensive end for that final six, seven minutes. But throughout the course of the season, we've been in some tough spots, been down a couple goals at halftime, at the end of first quarters, and we've always had that belief the whole season.

That game in the regular season, that was a really tough game for us and it gave us a lot of confidence going forward the rest of the season that we are never going to let that happen again. And I would just say, the belief in this group is unmatched, and there was never a doubt in this game that either side of the field was going to finish this thing off.

**Q. (No mic.)**

CJ KIRST: Our coaches are going to do a great job preparing us for Monday. We're going to enjoy the time we have together right now and focus on each other and getting our bodies right, and all eyes to playing Monday. We're going to do what we can to have a great practice

tomorrow and then get dialed in.

Yeah, just focus on each other.

**Q. CJ, how are you feeling physically after today, and what is it like to see when maybe the shots are not falling for you, other guys stepping up to make it happen?**

WYATT KNUST: Physically great. Obviously, not the shooting day or dodging day that I was planning on having, but you know, just the belief and the trust that Coach has done a great job implementing in our six-man offense that anyone can have a great day and Hughy stepped up big for us. Michael Long stepped up huge, and you have Michael Goldstein talking every single huddle about different, looks and that's kind of what it's been all year.

Sometimes I'm able to step up big for our group, but the other guys were making a huge impact, and you know, that's kind of the game at this point when you're playing the playoffs. You need guys to step up and super happy with the six-man offense that we were playing today.

**Q. Aside from winning and moving on to the finals, what was your favorite part from the game?**

CJ KIRST: Hudson, that's an epic question. I would say the environment. Like yourself, I'm sure you dream about playing in a Final Four and when you walk out there and see the big red fans and see all the kids running around, you're seeing Fan Fests on the drive over in the bus, that's the cool part about playing in this environment. You dream about it for so long and super excited to play again. So can't wait.

**Q. You alluded to this earlier, but how even keel were you guys able to handle things throughout the game. What does that stem from, and is there a sense with you guys that there is one of those bursts like you had in the third quarter waiting around the corner eventually?**

CONNOR BUCZEK: Yeah, I think this is a group that we spend a lot of time talking about challenges and putting them in challenging scenarios and making sure that easy is not acceptable. And so, from the time we recruit these guys to the time they come on campus, and throughout this year specifically, we spend a lot of time putting them in adverse situations. That's how you grow a little bit of a callus and an opportunity to stay in the fight. When we trust in each other and there's belief in the locker room that every player is going to do their job, they know they have been there before. There's an incredible confidence that comes from that.

So I'm really proud of the way that these guys have taken to that. They have shown resilience day-in and day-out, starting all the way back last year, but realistically, over their whole career at Cornell. The toughness and resilience is something we can hang our hat on. That's Cornell lacrosse, and I'm proud of the way they are playing.

**Q. How did Jack adjust from the 0-for-4 start to finish 16 of 20 going the rest of the way?**

CONNOR BUCZEK: Yeah, I think I'm more -- this is conjecture more than anything, but I think they were jumping some whistles and kind of guessing a little bit, and as they varied the cadence, they got violations and had should slow down their cadence.

Jack is quick, and he trusts his hands. He's not guessing anything. He got dialed in. If they are able to jump, good for them. That's the difference, a few violations there that slowed them down a little bit and made them whole a little bit. And from there, Jack has done what Jack's done all year. He's a resilient kid and tough kid, and he wins the big ones.

If I'm not mistaken, I think he won 10 of 12, or something along those lines, and that's the difference-maker for us. That allows them to play different ways and use them in the subgame and create opportunity for ourselves. You know, he's a superstar. He's a competitor. He's tough. He's resilient and today on the biggest stage, he did some pretty special things to help us win.

**Q. Staub's influence and whatnot there in the third quarter, how much of a difference has he made for you all season, and then talk about winning with CJ not having a typical game?**

CONNOR BUCZEK: Yeah, being poised in the clear, creating offense and recognizing opportunities to be aggressive. He's an All-American, and I think that was a miss on the country to not give him an All-American award this year. He does so much for you that if you turn on the tape, obviously, we have Singer who is an incredible player in his own right, but Brandon right next to him makes those plays, and Matt Dooley right next to him, they complement each other well.

With CJ not having the day he would have suspected, or we'd hope for, it's a six-man offense and we talk about that constantly. It's not about who is at the end of the rainbow, but who is doing jobs to create opportunities. Today, he did his job. He didn't press and try to do so much. He wasn't hunting his own, so make sure he felt good at the end of the day. He just wanted our team to win, and we

have got the best player in the country who is just making sure to make sure his team wins the game. You have a special group that trusts one another and believes one another and is going to handle whatever situation comes their way.

**Q. (No mic.)**

CONNOR BUCZEK: They have the keys. This is their program. I'm here to lead, mentor and coach. This is their program. The resilience you're seeing is all being driven from within. So when you've got young men that you can trust to do that, it really creates an incredibly high ceiling.

**Q. From a motivation standpoint, is there anything different you noticed compared to the game against Penn State in March?**

CONNOR BUCZEK: No. I think if the states were a little bigger, if you're not up at the final buzzer, you go home. Makes the stakes higher.

Outside of that, I don't think there was any change in how we approached it and the motivation and obviously we felt like we played a pretty good game but not a great game the first time around. We left some plays on the table, and that one stung. That one stung as bad as anything I've been a part of in a long time.

There are two options at that point. You can let that degrade your spirit or let it motivate you to move forward. I think that the group has taken it the right way and grown from it and understood and taken accountability from the plays we have left on table.

And not taking anything away them. They are an excellent team, well-coached, tough and disciplined. We recognize we left some plays out there. But that's been the mantra, commitment to improvement every single day. These guys recognize the urgency, and that's what's driven us forward.

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