

2018 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Championship

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Boston, Massachusetts

John Danowski

Nakeie Montgomery

Justin Guterding

Danny Fowler

Duke Blue Devils

THE MODERATOR: We have Duke head coach John Danowski, joined by Danny Fowler, Nakeie Montgomery and Justin Guterding. We'll start out with an opening statement from Coach Danowski. Coach?

JOHN DANOWSKI: Being a life long Giants fan and being around here really makes you want to almost root for the Patriots for sure. But, no, we're delighted to be here today and excited about the opportunity that tomorrow presents.

Yale arguably has one of the best offensive players in the last ten years that our sport has seen. Had the honor to work with him in the summer at the USA tryouts, and just thought that he was a fabulous player. Andy Shay has done a remarkable job with their program, not just this year, but over the last -- since he arrived on campus. So we have great respect for their program, their coach, and their players, and we're excited.

Q. I realize each season takes on a life of its own and has its own narrative arc and you have one more to go. But can you sum up the story of your season in your eyes?

JOHN DANOWSKI: For me personally, I won't allow myself to do that right now until it's over, only because last night we watched film, we graded the film. We had dinner at 7:30, team meeting at 9:30, we probably finished grading the film around midnight. Then we'll put this morning with the team we'll put last night

to bed and then we'll get to work on Yale. The assistant coaches right now are all watching film and getting their stuff ready.

So right now we're just kind of living in the moment.

Q. Nakeie, you have 14 goals in the season, eight of them coming in this tournament. Anything that clicked for you in the tournament? Did the game get slower for you and you adjusted well?

NAKEIE MONTGOMERY: Good question. I mean, I think we started clicking kind of as a team. It's kind of like this coming of age thing when your senior captain, Justin, starts to believe in you, and Brad Smith, and Peter Conley and the other seniors. Even the defensive guys, like Cade Van Raaphorst and JT, when all those guys start to believe in you, you start to believe in yourself more and you gain confidence. You kind of start making plays in practice that before you were nervous to make, you were nervous to throw that pass or you were nervous to dodge from that angle, things like that.

Like I said, having those guys start to believe in you and you start to do it in practice like, man, I really can do this, it just makes your game that much easier.

Q. John, the Yale guys are talking about this a little bit. They haven't seen a whole lot of you over the course of the year, and obviously you aren't terribly familiar with them. That's really kind of a rarity in this sport once you get to this point in the season. How do you think that's going to unfold tomorrow on the field?

JOHN DANOWSKI: You know, it's a great question. I think for us though, we've been really curious about Yale, and certainly when they put 27 on Brown, we were really interested in watching the highlights of that. They're a spectacular group. I think we've paid a little attention to them during the course of the year because of just watching them kind of run through their schedule and run through their opponents. So it's been -- we've admired them from afar the entire spring.

Q. Justin or Danny, I think the match-up we all wanted to see was you, Justin, and Reeves on the other side, two awesome offensive players. Are you guys able to appreciate how good he is offensively? Have you identified what makes him so special?

DANNY FOWLER: Yeah, obviously Ben Reeves is a very complete player, can do it all, impressive athlete. Yeah, so we're just looking to win our match-up on him and try to minimize him as much as we can. I'm sure he'll get a couple points tomorrow. That's how it goes when you play against a great player. But really right now we're looking to stop their offense as a group.

We really haven't looked too much at Yale. So far kind of putting yesterday to rest. But, yeah, he's a very impressive player and looking forward to the challenge to stop him.

JUSTIN GUTERDING: Yeah, Ben is an incredible player. He's incredibly athletic. I certainly think he's the best tackler in the country. He's just big, he's strong and he's fast. He can play with both hands. He's certainly something special. You know, it's going to be cool matching up against him. I'm psyched for our defense with that challenge going against another Tewaaraton finalist like we did yesterday against Connor Kelly, and they're certainly up to the challenge.

Q. What sort of similarities, if any, do you see between your program and Yale?

JOHN DANOWSKI: I'd like to think there's a -- this is maybe a little bit myopic, but there's a toughness, there's a work-ethic mentality that we both share. I see that in their play. They're physical, they're edgy, and I like to think that we look that way too.

When you're with your own team every day, you know, you mostly see your warts. You don't see the good things that your players do. You're constantly looking to be overly critical of your own team, your own players, your own coaching. You want to get better every day.

When you look at your opponent, you only see their great stuff. You don't see their practices and what their coaches are stressing over. So it's always kind of fascinating to compare. But I do think that both teams -- I'd like to think that both teams have a really incredible work ethic or team centric, team-oriented, and play selflessly.

Q. Danny, may I ask you what you remember being a freshman of the 2014 national title team? Because Yale will be having a freshman goalie start tomorrow. What you remember about that, and how different you'll approach tomorrow from maybe what you would have done had you been a starter in 2014?

DANNY FOWLER: It's hard to think back four or five years to when I was a red shirt playing in this game. I was definitely in a little bit of a state of awe the whole process. But, yeah. The way I approach it now, just keep it simple. I mean, it's a lot of stuff around this game, lot of possible distractions.

But at the end of the day, my job stays the same, just save the ball. So just try to focus on the release of the next shot, make the next stop. You could look at all these things around the game, but at the end of the day, my job is pretty simple.

Q. Anything about this team in particular that reminds you of your previous Final

Four teams or the championship teams and what makes this apart from any of those other teams?

JOHN DANOWSKI: Nothing reminds me of those other teams, and I mean that with tremendous admiration for this group.

Every group is different. The 2010 guys were on a mission because of 2006, and so that made them unique. The 2013 guys, you know, that group really -- like all these groups, they really love each other and then the 14 guys, the seniors wanted to outdo the 13 seniors. But the similarity, I guess, would be senior classes have been incredibly high character. The difference in this senior class is perhaps not every senior contributes every day or every game day, but they contribute every day, whether it's at team meals, in the locker room, at practice.

I mentioned this yesterday, but I've never been around a group of seniors who don't play who have been as selfless and just approach every day with such tremendous humility and strength as this group has had. That's really probably the strength of this team is the character of the senior group.

Q. Coach or Justin, you've talked a lot about Matt Danowski's relationship with Justin. How has that evolved over the years, and how crucial is that to Justin's success?

JOHN DANOWSKI: It's awesome to watch two like thoroughbreds butting, two rams on a mountain top butting heads. You know, they have this -- from an outsider's perspective, they have this love for one another. But neither one of them will stand down. It's really very cool to watch, very unique, and very, you know, it's just really fun to watch.

JUSTIN GUTERDING: Yeah, being coached by Matt is just a special experience for me, because obviously growing up, watching him play, he's one of my favorite players to ever play. It is a struggle every day because, you know, I get a grunt of his frustrations sometimes, but I certainly can take it. He knows that. That's why he comes after me so hard. I know he does it because he was the same way when he played, and I've certainly heard stories from other coaches. But it is certainly a special experience.

Q. Justin and Danny, from your perspective, how has this season evolved differently from other seasons earlier in your career as a team as a program?

DANNY FOWLER: Yeah, I don't know. Every team has a different story, you know? Every team is different. I think this year, as we did have a lot of success throughout the year with a record of 15-3, and now we're 16-3, but we did a really good job and the coaching staff did of staying critical on us, even through our wins, allowing us to continue to grow as a group.

You saw the evolution of a lot of young guys coming along. You're still seeing it now, guys like Nakeie, guys like Joe Robinson coming in. Lot of different guys stepping up at the right time. Just a group continuing to try to get better. We're still trying to get better from yesterday and improve for Monday.

JUSTIN GUTERDING: Yeah, for me, these past couple weeks have been just about having fun. I've been with these seniors now for four years. We just don't want it to end, and that's certainly the case for every senior class at every school that's still playing. No one wants this to end. But eventually it has to come to an end.

Tomorrow, no matter what, it will be our last day. Today's going to be the last practice, so we'll certainly have some fun with that. But certainly remain focused and hopefully achieve our goal from the beginning of the season.

Q. What do you remember about 2010 starting a freshman goalie in that title game? Of course you won it, but do you remember anything about that at all?

JOHN DANOWSKI: A little bit. One of the things I always thought that you had to have a goalie that was around 60% save percentage at the time in order to win a championship. That seemed to be the benchmark.

I think one of our worries going into that game was that he was below 50%. He was like 48, 49%. So that was the concern more than anything else. At this point in the game you're playing 17, 18 games. You're really not a freshman anymore. You've seen a lot of shots over the course of the year, and you've been in a lot of different situations. But that was the concern.

I just didn't know that you could win a championship being less than 50%, and certainly it happened. But that's my biggest recollection.

Q. For Nakeie, Danny, when he was a red-shirt freshman he mentioned he was in shock and awe. You're a freshman and playing this time. Anything like that? Anything you were stunned by like playing inside Gillette Stadium? Did that go away once you hit the field and scored three goals yesterday?

NAKEIE MONTGOMERY: What's your name?

Q. Chris.

NAKEIE MONTGOMERY: Love the hat. I'm a Cowboys fan, but I think it's pretty crazy you wore that. That's awesome. Chris, no. I was more kind of shellshocked during our practice two days ago. Kind of got out there for practice and saw all the empty seats, and I was like -- I remember, J-Robs my bus partner, Joe Robertson, and I remember sitting on the bus with him and it's like, "Yo, is this seriously what we're about to do? Are we seriously about to go play in this

stadium?"

But I think it was the least nervous for any game I've been in all season for some reason, which is so weird, because obviously the night before didn't fall asleep until 2:15, 2:30. I just couldn't sleep. Like worried about the game and stuff. But in the actual game, it was by far the least nervous I've ever been.

I remember in the Air Force game, my first game, I was freaking out, and I was like wide open. Like I first finally got into the game and Justin threw me a ball and I just dropped it. I was so shook, like, oh, my God, what's happening. But, no, it was awesome.

Another thing, I was really excited to play in front of my mom again. My mom came, and so that kind of, for me, that was, I guess, another thing that kind of made me feel more safe. She came, it was the second game she'd seen me play live in college, and that was another really awesome thing.

But to answer your question, no, no nerves. I was just excited to get out there.