

Penn State Men's Soccer
Head Coach Jeff Cook Postgame Press Conference
vs. Indiana, Big Ten Tournament Championship - November 14, 2021

Opening Statement

What a special day for our program at Penn State. We're so proud to represent this university and all of our athletic programs. It's a great moment. I'd like to recognize our players and student-athletes and their mentality in the last few weeks of the season, their determination, their quality to achieve what we need is just remarkable. It's a testament to what they've done collectively through the season. I also think it's important to acknowledge Indiana. Coach Yeagley and his staff and players, they're an unbelievable team and a great program. Certainly, their tradition and their success speaks for itself. It's a special feeling. I'm really, really proud of what we did in the regular season, and now winning the Big Ten Tournament championship puts us in a great position for the NCAA Tournament. So again, very proud day for us.

Q: Now that you guys have done the double, is it, first of all, metaphoric that it's against Indiana, and second of all, what does it mean to finally overcome the hump?

A: For us, we recognize that the Big Ten Conference on men's soccer is among the national leaders and Indiana has been at the forefront of that in the last several years going into the history book with eight national championships. So, to be able to get over the burden, if you will, of mentally winning that game, I hope will be significant not only today but in the future. It doesn't mean that we're always going to win every game. We play against Indiana because they're an outstanding team, but it means that when we come into these games, we can play with a bit more confidence and more edge. For me, I would say that the opening 20-25 minutes I felt were somewhat tentative and not as aggressive as we've been, but that's playing with that pressure, and I thought that the last part of the first half I thought we were excellent and deserved to win today.

Q: You guys have been really competitive with Indiana over the last couple years, obviously in this game last year you guys lost to them in penalty kicks and it was a razor-close game during the regular season this year as well. What do you think really allowed your team to get over the hump today and come away with a win?

A: I think goals, and I don't mean that lightly. When you're playing against a team and the defensive quality they have, you have to create high percentage chances to get the goals. In the first goal from [Seth Kuhn] from the right foot, I'm not sure how high percentage that is with his left-foot dominance, but a great finish. [Tyger Evans'] finish with his right foot and then [Pierre Reedy], so special for him and what he's done for this program to score the third goal. I think we had to reinforce our moments when we were in charge of the game with goals and today, that was the difference for me. In the tournament final last year, Indiana suffered a red card late in the second half, and we had some territory, but we weren't able to turn that into a goal. Today, fortunately we were able to do that, and I think it made a huge difference.

Q: [Kris Shakes] hasn't let up any goals since Maryland, so can you talk a little bit about how he's been doing and how he's been such a good player out there?

A: The word I would use for Kris is mentality and maturity, where he's been very composed and his decision making has been really very good. That transfers further up the field and back. First of all, you know what he's capable of doing, and I thought today the process was a really busy situation with lots of bodies around him as a defender.

Q: Picking Danny Bloyou and Tyger Evans off the bench and then seeing them come into the game, doing really, really well, what does that mean for the offensive play that you had going on?

A: When we have the depth that we have, and we can make changes to the lineup like that and they can impact the game, and I think what we did today is gave Indiana a threat that they had to deal with behind their defense. It opened up more possibilities for us to get in possession and when we make subs, it's such a great feeling as a coach that you can bring a player in to the game and make a positive impact. That is the mentality that these guys have embraced all year long and I want to give them a lot of credit because obviously, every player wants to start, every player wants to play all the time. That's what I have to manage and, but they have been outstanding in the way that they've embraced that that's what's best for the team and that's not just [Danny Bloyou] and [Tyger Evans], but the whole groups so I think that's a key part of who we are as a team.

Q: Knowing your mentality, you're probably thinking you have to win the next game, it's not done yet. So, what do you tell the players who are visibly pretty hyped over there?

A: First of all, enjoy it. We'll see what happens with the selection show tomorrow. I personally will put in my two cents: I think we deserve to be a seed now. If we win five games in a row, we'll be in a pretty good place in the NCAA Tournament. Second, let's get our feet on the ground. We have a great opportunity, and all the guys absolutely deserve to be in the position that they're in and that's not coincidence. They've earned it, and I think we need to enjoy and recognize how hard it is to do what they've done. It's a great credit to them. It's so difficult to win a Big Ten regular season, and then when you talk about winning the double, the quality and effort and concentration that takes is a remarkable achievement.

Q: Obviously being the number one seed and the Big Ten regular season champions, and all of your tournament games here at Jeffrey Field in front of all these fans, what kind of impact do you think that made on the team's play and their ability to keep fighting through?

A: I can't overstate how much of a difference it makes when you come out of the locker room and you hear the noise and support and the enthusiasm. It makes a difference, it really does. We talked about energy and coaches talk about having the willingness to run and compete. It drives you forward and I think for me, in my four seasons, I feel like that's relatively short and it's gone by quick, but I'm so happy and thankful for the contribution that the fans are making. It absolutely does make a difference and we're hoping we can get a couple of games here at home in the NCAA tournament.

Q: How proud were you when they scored that goal in the second half?

A: I was proud and relieved. That second goal makes a huge difference. I'll share with you from inside the group, [Tyger Evans] is very exciting. He's fast and lively, he's hard to stop, but what we've been asking them to do at practice, there has to be some kind of exclamation point behind it like a pass or a shot and to do it in this championship game really, really makes a difference.

Q: What was the key for your guys defensively in this tournament? Obviously, the backline was really good and [Kris Shakes] was outstanding.

A: I think for us it was cover behind. We wanted to get good pressure on the ball, but one thing I thought we did particularly well in this game, Indiana has a lot of players who make good forward runs, and I think us having covered behind the first line of pressure made a huge difference. But I'll say that defending from the front is key to work even with our forwards starting the pressure on the field is very, very important the way we play.