

College World Series: Baton Rouge Regional

Monday, June 5, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Hayden Travinski

Josh Pearson

Dylan Crews

Postgame Press Conference



average like 45, or seven home runs, what is it about the NCAA Tournament that you take it up a notch?

DYLAN CREWS: I don't know. A deeper will to win. A deeper will to compete with my teammates. Yeah, just go out there and try to have as much fun as I possibly can with these guys. I don't know -- the more fun I have, I guess the better I play. So that's what I try and do.

Q. Dylan, you mentioned earlier this week you've been waiting kind of three years to have this experience to play postseason ball at the box. Did it kind of live up to everything you expected and talk about the offense, how you guys did this weekend?

DYLAN CREWS: It's definitely lived up to the expectations that I had for sure. The energy, the atmosphere was unbelievable. And all the guys, I think, had some tunnel vision for this weekend. And it worked out, everybody was gelling pretty well this weekend. We just passed it to the next guy, really. We had faith in all the guys. All the pitchers came in and pounded the zone and did what they needed to do.

Q. Josh, you had a big weekend, playing pretty well here of late. What clicked for you maybe over the last couple of weeks?

JOSH PEARSON: Just showing up to the field every day and just trusting my process, even if I'm not in the lineup or anything, just doing whatever I can to help the team win that day, every at-bat, slowing it down, being where my feet are, just trying to help the offense.

Q. Dylan, that home run you had yesterday, you were about as excited as I think anyone has seen you, what was sort of that moment for you? And was that sort of the biggest home run you've hit so far in your NCAA career?

DYLAN CREWS: I just tried to get the offense going, really. I felt like it was a spark for this lineup to kind of get going before the rain delay. We trusted our plan. We had the right plan going in.

LSU - 13, Oregon State - 7

COACH JOHNSON: Really proud of the team. I think this was a great week. The preparation by the players and the staff was elite. And then the execution on the field by the players on all sides of the ball was outstanding. Great job by our pitching staff for the three games. Really proud of the guys today the way they executed what we laid out for them. Defensively, I thought we had a great weekend. One error today. But I think that was it.

And then offensively, really, really, really strong performance in three different kind of ways. But I think it shows the capability of this team. And really proud of them. And we're going to get reset, put together another great week, and get prepared for the coming weekend.

Q. Hayden, you had a big weekend at the plate, and I just want to know, as of late, I think you've homered in 10 of the last 20 games you've played in. What's been working for you lately?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: Just trusting myself and really, like, key holding different spots and not getting outside of my plan in that aspect. When I say trust myself, just not overdoing anything. I know I'm strong, so I don't really have try to force balls to be hit hard. I've just got to let it happen. And that's about it.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: I don't know, I couldn't even tell you. I guess just a deep connection, I suppose.

Q. Dylan, you have a career NCAA Tournament



But the bats were a little quiet. We were able to go in and reset our minds. I think it was just a turning point to get the team going and the crowd going. So it felt good.

Q. Dylan, just getting to play at Alex Box Stadium postseason atmosphere I know you looked forward to that for a while how was the whole experience for you this weekend?

DYLAN CREWS: It was unbelievable. I think this was just the best -- the atmosphere was the best I've seen since I've been here so far. It was awesome. I think the players lived up to it, too. They enjoyed every bit of it. It was great to see everybody out there. It was awesome.

Q. Dylan, so many players speak so highly of your mentality. What is the one thing that just keeps you grounded throughout the season?

DYLAN CREWS: I guess just the balance really throughout the year. Just trusting my process every day but also doing things that I love outside of baseball, which is going fishing or hanging out with friends, really. I think the balance, keeping the mind fresh all the time, it gets me, I don't know, more willing and having more fun out there. So, yeah, it's awesome.

Q. Hayden, you caught a variety of lefties today. I just wanted to know, from your perspective, what was working for Riley Cooper, Griffin Herring and Nate Ackenhausen?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: It was a good change because we primarily threw righties throughout the week. It's good to have both especially coming out of the pen. Like I say, we trust our guys, we trust anybody coming out of the pen to get the job done, especially for that hitter that they're supposed to face. It's awesome. Griffin took big strides and Nate looked good as usual, and it was good to see Coop out there as well.

Q. Hayden, Coach mentioned winning games in different ways. Obviously the first game was very different than the last two games, how much confidence does that give you? I know he preaches it all the time, but to execute it and do it?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: In postseason play you have to score in every possible way. The big emphasis for us is when runners are in position slowing down and putting a good bat together. That's the whole focus for our lineup, quality at-bats, pass it to the next guy and keep it moving.

JOSH PEARSON: Like Hayden said, keep the stick moving a lot. Some days the wind might be blowing in,

something like that, we might have to put a couple of bunts down. It's good to know that everybody in the lineup can help move the offense.

Q. Through this weekend, having Josh in front of you creating offense the way he did, what did it do for you as the lead-off hitter to have him in front of you?

DYLAN CREWS: It was awesome having him bat in the 9-hole batting in front of me when the lineup switch is over. There's no breathing room in this lineup, really. I think everybody has the opportunity and potential to hit a home run at any point. And he gets on base a lot of times. So it helps turn the lineup over and gets to the top of the order, keeps the momentum going.

Q. Hayden, there was a lot of discussion about how you guys would pitch this weekend, the strategy. It appeared to all lay out perfectly. Could you just describe how it went and the importance of the marble game, in particular, last night tonight to get to today?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: How we pitched? How LSU -- how we pitched. It was huge, a lot of big starts especially from Skenes. Ty threw really well yesterday. And Coop did a great job coming out. I think everyone on our team has the ability to go out execute. We have faith in each other. I think that's the biggest part.

Q. Hayden, you have spoken a lot the last month about the injuries you've had throughout your career. How rewarding is it to have a stretch like this where you're coming through in such big moments for the team?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: It's rewarding, but I know we have goals that aren't fulfilled. So my priority is just to keep moving. Like, it feels good. It's awesome. I'm glad I can provide for the team. I think that's the biggest part. Just being able to do my job when my number's called.

Q. Hayden, just to understand, Coach told you the news after the game, how important was Wes for this staff this year, how did he help you? I talked to Jordan he said he helped him, not even just pitchers but do you feel you had a good relationship with him, do you feel he helped the team?

HAYDEN TRAVINSKI: Absolutely. There's multiple pitchers he helped propel them forward in a big way. He's a great baseball mind. Great human. He's going to do great things at that school. And I couldn't be happier for a person.

Q. Josh, you said that trust and having faith in the

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players when you can't do it yourself. How essential has that been this season?

JOSH PEARSON: Oh, yeah, it's everything. I mean, this year has been the most fun I've had my whole entire life playing baseball. It's because if Hayden's up to bat I know he'll do whatever he can to help the team win, the same thing for Dylan, everybody in the lineup or on the bench, everybody wants to do the same thing, it's to go to Omaha and win a national championship.

Q. Josh, Jordan spoke on the field about kind of the later guys in the lineup, how it becomes the top of the order. I mean, two triples in the fourth inning of Game 2 and Game 3, big hits by Jordan as well. Do you have some late in the batting order chemistry going there?

JOSH PEARSON: My main goal is to turn the offense over get it to the big hitters like Dylan and Tommy and Hayden and everybody else. My main goal is just to get on first base every time I go up to bat.

Q. Dylan, your high school coach surprised you this weekend, how special is that for you?

DYLAN CREWS: It was pretty awesome. I haven't seen him in a long time. Just to get him over here and watch me play, it was pretty special. Put a big smile on my face to see him out there and support me and the Tigers.

Q. Dylan, how is the neck?

DYLAN CREWS: I'm good. I am going to need an ice bath after this, for sure.

Q. Jay, this weekend in every phase of the game, was it one of your more complete weekends hitting, starting pitching, relief pitching, fielding, was it one of the more complete weekends you've had this year?

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think it was very complete baseball. I think it was complementary baseball. I remember the first game in the season, you know, Paul went out and threw a shutout. We played error-less defense and hit a few homers and moved the ball with runners in scoring position and talked about that being a good model. And sometimes we've done two of the three well. And usually when we've done two of the three well we win because we have really good players that have a good plan.

But I feel good about how we executed and played complementary baseball this weekend.

Q. Obviously the news just broke about Wes Johnson.

Does he plan on staying for the rest of the season?

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, he's locked in. This has been done for about five days. I mean, I think the preparation and the execution of the pitching staff this weekend speaks for itself. And it's just a new time in college athletics. So I would just -- we were having a meeting tomorrow morning, I was going to tell him tomorrow morning. But obviously you don't get to that point. But I love him like a brother. I can't imagine only spending 11 months with somebody and connecting the way that we have.

And we're going to get a great pitching coach. I'm not even worried about that or dialling any of that stuff in. I just love working with him. And he's made a big impact on our guys, and it's been great. But it is what it is. And I don't have any reason to worry about how we're going to roll going forward.

Q. Over the last really the last couple of weeks the pitching staff has gradually improved. Is that just sort of a testament to how this team has sort of grown with Wes and really taken his advice?

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think sometimes what gets lost in this environment, meaning the SEC or the top of college baseball, look back at our schedule. I would add Oregon State to that this weekend. And then the SEC Tournament. And there's eight Regional hosts from our conference this year.

I think we played six of the eight. And so you're going to get hit in the mouth a little bit. What I always have had confidence in is we've kind of always rallied back. I mean, lost a nine-run lead to Mississippi State and then went out and pitched three really good games in a row after that. Sometimes that gets lost.

But this is also a development-based business. And sometimes guys develop at different times. Griffin Herring probably wasn't ready to do what he did today in March. But he developed over the course of time. And because we had gotten him in some of those situations, he was totally in control of himself out there.

And those are all over the team. I mean, just a couple -- Hayden, like, the guy's been hurt nonstop for the past two years but he just stayed with it. While he wasn't in the lineup and Brady and Alex were playing, he just kept getting better. Now he was ready for his time.

That's just part of maybe the curtain that doesn't get pulled back for everybody outside of us, but we see it. And it gives you confidence in guys in settings like this. So, yeah, they've developed in a great way.

Q. You've talked a good bit about Josh Pearson recently because of the way he's played. When he did get his shot here, what do you think allowed him to play well down the stretch?

COACH JOHNSON: You know, he controls his heartbeat. He's a good hitter. He has a good, short swing. Manages the zone really well. And if you asked him, he kind of got outplayed a little bit going into the season by a number of good players on this team. And this was a competitive -- it's the best offense in the country. So it's hard to get in that lineup.

But he kept working. Kind of the same as Hayden. Stayed positive. I had a meeting with him right before we started conference play and I said I'm going to play you tomorrow just because I trust you. And he was big in that series win at Texas A&M.

And played well against Arkansas and played well against Tennessee. And cooled off. And somebody heated up. It just comes down to I trust him to take championship-level at-bats and to do these things that these guys articulated already. He just brings a lot in that regard.

Q. Throughout all the delays these past few days with weather and all these different things that have come up, what do you say the one thing as you're teaching these boys that's important when things like that do happen?

COACH JOHNSON: I mean, they would talk about controlling what you can control. And you hear us talk about preparation a lot, overcoming challenges.

Kind of the saying I have with them there's no problems, there's only challenges. It's all mindset. And we're going to be a no-drama program. Tell us when to play.

If there's lightning within eight miles, I guess that means you can't play. So let us know when we can get back out there and be prepared.

I was really proud of them for how locked in we were when we restarted the game yesterday. I was proud of them for showing up ready to play even though we didn't play on Saturday.

And I think that is just maturity. And as it should be. We have old players. A lot of these guys, we were in a very tightly contested Regional last year. And they used that experience to their benefit this weekend.

Q. Obviously it feels good to be able to win your

Regional, but how much are you emphasizing to your guys like, yes, we're going to celebrate today but we have bigger things that we're looking forward to, especially making it to Omaha?

COACH JOHNSON: I think the best thing that happened was, as I said earlier in my opening statement, the preparation for this weekend was elite. So they have a blueprint.

So I want them to enjoy this. I think if you don't for a minute you kind of forget about why are you actually doing this. And then they'll have a very structured plan starting with our meeting later tomorrow morning of how we're going to attack next weekend.

And I have no concern whatsoever of them being ready to play next weekend.

Q. You obviously had broke this down backwards and forwards in terms of your approach and how you were going to pitch it. I just wanted your thoughts now after that you've won the three games to start Skenes first and then Thatcher to team up with Ty, and the job your guys did today along with those rain delays that kind of challenged you there.

COACH JOHNSON: This is always one of my favorite weeks of the year. And I love the preparation part of it. Once we got the bracket, we started looking at each team and maybe where the potential trouble spots, problems might arise.

It's postseason baseball. I think going with Paul, I'm guessing, is the nature of the question, I thought it would help the team settle into the postseason.

And the weather thing, that was the real deal. And I have some underground sources, that I used all of them. And I'm not going to sit here tell you that was all of the decision but that was certainly part of the decision.

I remember in 2016, my team won a Regional at Louisiana-Lafayette and then we bussed straight to Mississippi State for Super Regional. That was on Tuesday. And LSU's Regional was still being played on Tuesday. So knowing that there was some weather, the potential that you could possibly pitch twice if that was needed, if the pitch count was low in one of those situations.

And I don't think anybody gives Ty Floyd enough credit. The guy's undefeated. That means he's not lost a game. I'm not a genius, but I think it's good when you can pitch guys that have not lost a game.



Q. Riley Cooper has been pitching for you for a while now. If you could go back to his freshman year, which I know he pitched in a lot of high-leverage situations for you at Arizona, what did you identify with him that made you trust him so quickly, and how has he grown?

COACH JOHNSON: Trust is the keyword. First off, go back and look at his high school statistics he was 31-1. High school baseball in Fresno, California is really good. He was a winner. That was the first thing. We recruited him at Arizona because he was a winner.

And then he pitched in some big spots as a freshman. And I'll never forget this. Opening game, so part of back to the pitching strategy, in 2021 as a freshman, we pitched our ace, Chase Silseth, who is already in the Major Leagues. He gave up like four fast.

We were down 4-0 in game one of the home Regional as a host, national seed. They were a little bit left-handed. So we rolled him out there and allowed our team to come back. It was a really solid performance.

The very next weekend, against Ole Miss, game one of the Super Regional, Major League pitcher gives up three in the first inning. We come back and kind of tie it up and then we go right to him again. And he shuts Ole Miss down and helps us get to Omaha.

Then goes to Omaha, and we're playing in front of 26,000 people against Vanderbilt and you're rolling him out there. And the heartbeat is slow and he just executes. He pitched in two games in the NCAA Tournament last year.

There's never been a question about whether he can do it or not. And I mean he's had some of the most important pitching performances of the two years that we've been here. He's just a winner.

And sometimes it's not about velocity of the fastball. It's not about the metrics. It's about who is a winner. And Riley Cooper is a winner, and we're a winning time right now. That's why he was chosen today and the fact that we thought specifically, after watching the game last night, that he would match up well with Oregon State.

Q. Just more as a big picture, you got what probably perfect scenario out of your pitching staff, I guess. Just right guys, right time. Do you feel it's rounding into what you wanted it to be?

COACH JOHNSON: Yes and no, because if it was perfect, Chase Shores, Garrett Edwards, Grant Taylor, Jaden Noot

would be out there. These guys are Major Leaguers. I think it speaks to how quality of a team that we have, that we've lost all of those guys and we're sitting here 46-15 and playing home baseball with two wins to get to Omaha.

And again, like this game is not designed like football and basketball. And there's going to be some failure in it. And I'm just proud of them for kind of withstanding some of that.

And the response. And we needed to do two things well. When we brought relievers into the game, they needed to be ready to get the first guy out because we're bringing them in at a certain time to face a certain hitter. And we've started to do that really, really well. Every guy did that today.

Then when something goes wrong to reset for the next pitch. And mentally I would give pitchers a lot higher marks over the past couple of weeks, Georgia, SEC Tournament, and this weekend, prior to what we were doing the two weekends before that.

And then you can look before that and there were some pretty good runs of pitching there, at Ole Miss and Tennessee here. And you start moving forward, there were some other guys coming into the end of the game that we'll be excited to have back some day.

Q. You say it's never about Omaha, it's one game at a time, one day at a time. Is that still the mindset leading into Super Regionals?

COACH JOHNSON: Yes, we talked about a couple of things going into the postseason. Number one is it's a John Wooden thing of it's amazing what can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit. And these guys are a team. And they're all about the togetherness part of it. They've done a wonderful job with that.

So that's one thing. And then the other thing is just legitimately, no matter where we're at, that is where we were at. We're not worried about the next game. We're not worried about the next inning, the next pitch, just being incredibly present. And I think when you look at the complementary baseball that was played from the mound, from the field, offensively, executing in a lot of ways, they did that this weekend. And so again my hope is that encourages them to stay locked into that frame of mind. And if they do that, then we play really good baseball.

If they do that, I can legitimately surrender the result because I know the mindset is right.

Q. Last year in Hattiesburg you were bitterly

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disappointed when you guys lost because a couple at-bats -- maybe you're hosting a Super Regional last year -- from that point now to get to host the Super Regional I know that's not the ultimate goal, but how much fuel did that add to the fire for this season?

COACH JOHNSON: I don't need any more motivation. This is my entire life. And I mean, there's losses I think about every day. That loss of the national championship game with tying run on third and winning run on second. I'm over it. I'm at peace with it. But I think about it every single day to this day. That one hurt. Not for the -- we didn't do this or didn't do that. I really wanted those guys to go to Omaha.

You know what I mean? That's a group of guys that had not been there other than the guys we brought. So that's the part for me. It's like I want this for them. And so we don't need any more motivation, though. We could do some things like Coach Bertman has done and we'll still be plenty motivated around here, I promise.

Q. You were saying the other day that Hayden Travinski isn't just a feel-good story, he's a really good baseball player. Obviously two home runs this weekend. What are some of the things that make him so effective at the plate?

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think he's got -- he's very gifted in terms of his size, his physical strength. I think he loves hitting, and I think that's what the great part about this has been, is I was watching everything that was happening before we actually kind of put him in there. And you're taking this talented guy that figured out a process to develop to get him to that point. And then he's got nothing to lose.

And those guys with talent that have nothing to lose that have the right plan, they can be scary. And he's in that mode right now. And he's so in control of himself. Like the homers grab your attention but how about the RBI single to right field on the change-up? I think that was his last at-bat or second-to-last at-bat. Those are the things you go about, you throw it over here he's going to hit it off the scoreboard he's willing to do that because that's what the game called for at that point. That's professional hitting.

Q. For most of the year Riley has really struggled. The last two outings, not only been effective but he's looked more confident on the mound, what do you say about his last two outings?

COACH JOHNSON: He really wanted to pitch today. He got to us after the game was over. And I had already had it in my mind what we were going to do. But it was like, hey,

man, let's go. Like give me the ball and we're going to win kind of attitude. I thought that's how he pitched in Hoover also.

If we would have done a little bit more with Hagen Smith from Arkansas, we would have won that game largely because of how well he pitched, and I believe Arkansas is one of the best teams in the country.

And I'm really pleased with how he's been down the stretch. He pitched good in that game, the game we lost the lead to Mississippi State. He was the guy that came in and gave us a chance and pitched good in Hoover. It's been pretty good. We've been in an upward tick here lately.

Q. First run was scored on a hit-by pitch and you've all been hit by pitch 251 times over the last two seasons. Can you explain why that might be happening?

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, but I won't. No. It's unselfish play, you know what I mean? We have a hitting approach. We stick to our hitting approach. Part of that approach is to win what we call the free base war. We want to walk, hit-by pitches. Make less errors than our opponents. Advance on balls in the dirt, steal bases when it allows. If you win those categories, you'd be amazed at how little else you have to do to win the game.

Most college baseball games are actually lost. They're not won. And that part of it and taking pride and being willing to do that is just kind of part of our formula for winning.

Q. There's a lot of teams that were highly ranked all year that were hosting this weekend that are no longer playing moving forward. I just wanted to get your take on how difficult it is to actually win at this time of year.

COACH JOHNSON: I'll be honest, I haven't scoreboard watched a whole lot because we've been really locked in on what we're doing here. I have no idea of anything that happened today. It's hard. I mean, again, what coach did here and the flags and doing it that frequently, that should really be appreciated because it's not that easy.

And I tell them this all the time. I'm very thankful for what he did here because it's made LSU LSU and the best place to coach in the country, but what he did is he made all the teams in the Southeastern Conference better too which makes my job a lot harder.

But it's hard to win, it's hard to win one college baseball game. And so all elements of the program have to function at a high level, recruiting, development, coaching staff. The engagement of the players and what's going on. And

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even when you do all those things right, it doesn't guarantee success. But if you don't have all of that you don't have a chance to win on this stage.

Q. I know last year your lefties were just basically Riley Cooper. How important is it to have two to three more guys who can throw from the left side?

COACH JOHNSON: It's huge. Yeah, it will be something it will be a point of emphasis going forward. I think I learned as a young coach like having left-handed hitting and left-handed pitching is a key formula if you want to win at the highest level. And obviously having those three guys out there today, we didn't use Javen because he would have started the game, obviously if we had to play another game.

What an asset that's been. And really happy to have Jake Brown and Kade Anderson coming down the pipe next year. And we'll just keep piling them up.

Q. Wondered, the success you had this week, does it get the wheels turning as far as what your staff and capabilities are for next week when you've only got to win two?

COACH JOHNSON: Are you talking about the pitching staff? Yeah, I feel really good about how we came out of this. I think we're playing on Friday but I haven't heard that officially. I thought they just do it by what side of the bracket you're on.

So we're set whether we play Friday or Saturday, where we wanted to be coming out of this.

Q. When interviewing Ackenhausen, he said that Wes Johnson taught him a lot mentally about himself that he didn't know. Would you say Wes has left his mark mentally for these boys?

COACH JOHNSON: Absolutely. He's done a great job with those guys. And between the ears, that's a huge part of our program and how we operate. I'm not a pitching mechanics guy, per se, but you notice I go to the mound a lot. It's literally just to help them in those moments.

And about what's going on in the game and just getting them reconnected to execute the things that Wes has taught them. He's very complete as a coach. And like I said, he's a great person. And his impact is not done here. He's with us, with us, you know what I mean? And we've hashed out everything we need to hash out to be in the right spot.

And we're in a good spot moving forward.