

College World Series: Baton Rouge Super Regional

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Paul Skenes

Tre' Morgan

Postgame Press Conference



yourself down and just get out there and execute, that's all you need to do.

Q. Paul, part of the game plan for you today, was it to be a little bit more aggressive with your off-speed pitches and your breaking ball? We were just talking to Coach Nick, and that was one of the things he noted with your performance today.

PAUL SKENES: Yeah, last time we faced them, I think I struck out 13, and 12 of them were on the breaking ball. A lot of the time you just have to feel them out and understand what their game plan is off me because it changes from week to week, and we're not totally sure what it's going to be going into the week.

So we got a good feel for that early in the game, and then went out there and executed pretty well.

Q. Tre', from your perspective, what's it like to wait out a seven-hour rain delay, and how do you keep your focus as a hitter?

TRE' MORGAN: I mean, it was huge for us when we were in the locker room. The whole team was pretty much together. We were watching other games going by. But Coach Johnson told us to stay locked in, and as soon as we get the window to go, to be ready. He challenged us to make sure we were ready, so we felt the need to go out there and show him.

Q. Paul, can you talk about the idea that the delay was to preserve your start, the other pitcher's start, not just you specifically, but the importance of that, knowing that that's kind of why we were in the situation we all were in, and did that add any pressure for you to perform?

PAUL SKENES: No, not at all. The whole time I was sitting in there for the delay, all I was thinking is that we're just going to get 11,000 -- I don't know how many people were at the game, but 12,452 people are going to go home and drink beer and then come back and be even louder.

Q. Paul, you noted the last time you faced UK you had

LSU 14, Kentucky 0

JAY JOHNSON: Great performance by our team. Obviously, as usual, started with Paul pounding the strike zone with all his pitches, executing at a high level. I thought the at-bats tonight were really good. Had a good plan. Guys stuck to it. Got some good swings.

Then played good defense for the most part, and the engagement of the team throughout the day was very mature and outstanding, and look forward to tomorrow.

Q. Paul, walking off the mound there in the eighth inning, can you talk about the emotions and what this year has meant playing at LSU and in these moments?

PAUL SKENES: Yeah, I've gotten asked a couple times the past couple weeks about what my expectations were coming in here. It's not anything close -- I wasn't expecting anything close to what I've received the last couple weeks, which has been -- it was an awesome opportunity to come here in the first place. Never thought that I would be receiving the love and all that from the fans that I've gotten the past couple weeks.

It's so cool.

Q. Paul, the start of the game, you guys had to wait all day to play, and then to see all those people, and they were so loud to start at 9:00, you're a very intense player, but did that rev you up any more to start the game?

PAUL SKENES: Yeah, a little bit, but it always does, especially coming into a game like this. You know that the adrenaline is going to be high and the emotions are going to be high. There are high stakes. But being able to calm



the 13 strikeouts against them, but also the four earned runs were the most any opponent has had on you this year. Did that add any extra motivation for you?

PAUL SKENES: Going into every weekend, you scout the hitters. It was nice to go into this weekend, watch a lot of video on the hitters and looked into their data be also had another outing to go off of. We had a really good plan. I don't know that it was any extra motivation, but we definitely had more data to go off of, I would say.

Q. Could you talk about the gamesmanship, the preening that you guys do when you complete a home run trot? How do they all get started? It seems to fire you guys up.

TRE' MORGAN: Yeah, it's called hitting the Tommy. Tommy brought it from where he came from. When he sits there and kind of leans back, sinks in his heels and crosses his arms, it's obviously kind of towards our team, and it definitely fires us up.

Q. Paul, what did you do for the several hours in between when the game was first -- did you nap or work out? What did you do? You probably never had a situation like that before.

PAUL SKENES: For the first delay, I went home, played with the dog and got some food, came back, and then warmed up again, and then for the second delay I kind of sat around, did what I needed to do to stay warm. Obviously didn't know when the game was going to start, but I was pretty much warm the whole time.

Q. Tre', could you talk about the offense coming around for guys like yourself and Tommy, guys that try to see it and did well tonight?

TRE' MORGAN: Yeah, definitely. We know the work that we put in can't change, no matter if we're successful or if we're struggling a little bit.

We also know that everybody in that dugout believes we're going to get the job done every time we step up there. That's the confidence that we walk around with, and it definitely boosts us a lot bit. Or a lot bit, actually.

You walk around, no matter how you're hitting, it doesn't matter, it's this at-bat, when you step in there, and you pretty much expect to get the job done.

Q. Paul, so many players talk about how the mentality is just something that they really look up to. What is something you do to stay grounded throughout the

season?

PAUL SKENES: I think everything just goes back to execution, working throughout the week, my bullpens, my catch play, all that, to go out there on Friday or Saturday night and execute. Obviously we know what the game plan is going to be on the opposing team, so we're working toward that. We're also working toward what I did well and what I didn't do well the last week. But if you make it simple like that, then it's easy to just go out there and have that consistent mindset.

Q. Tre', you had your first two home runs after starting pitcher Zack Lee. What were you looking for from him, and what did you discuss in the scouting report?

TRE' MORGAN: Yeah, last week I struggled a little bit because I felt like I was a little antsy. I wasn't working the middle to top of field like I usually do, I was kind of pulling off on balls.

So earlier when we were working out, hitting in the cages, BP and stuff, I was working on seeing the ball to take deeper.

And I even took it into the game. I wanted to make sure even if I was a little late I was going to make sure see the ball, take deeper, tried to work it the other way, and it worked out for me.

Q. Tre', I guess you're never surprised by your fans, but as long as the delays were today and for the place to be that packed and that loud, what were your thoughts?

TRE' MORGAN: We knew that if the game started at 2:00 it was definitely going to be loud. But the longer we waited, the cooler it got out there, we knew it was going to get even more rowdy. Once that window opened up and I kind of walked out the locker room onto the field and looked around, I was like, Yeah, this is exactly what I was expecting.

Q. Paul, as we were coming up and the season is obviously ending, we're in postseason, but what's it been like at LSU, coming from the Air Force and this being a completely different community?

PAUL SKENES: It's pretty much the exact opposite. I was talking to somebody before I came over here, we averaged I think 150 fans last year when we were at home, and now we have 12,000 fans every game it feels like.

But it's been really cool to be welcomed here and to enjoy the crowd. I was looking forward to this start for a while



knowing that it was going to be the last one at Alex Box Stadium, and it meant a lot.

Q. Paul, I know you will have a different approach than most people would think about, but you're one win away from Omaha. How do you control those emotions tomorrow and performing and playing?

PAUL SKENES: The only thing we have to do tomorrow is execute, and it's going to work out. Coach talks about the standard above winning. If we do everything right and we execute to the best of our abilities, it's all going to take care of itself. It's a cool opportunity, but obviously got to come out tomorrow and just execute, and then we're going to have a cool team trip to Nebraska.

TRE' MORGAN: Yeah, as soon as we wake up tomorrow, today means nothing. We're going to go out there and win one pitch at a time. Like that's our motto. That's what we're going to go out there and do.

Obviously we know what the end goal is. We know what the result could be. But we're not worried about the result. We're going to pretty much lock in on as many pitches as we can.

Q. Jay, what were your thoughts this afternoon when you look out your office window and there was no rain all afternoon? Were you like, what happened?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I didn't really think much about it, to be honest with you. I've said this before, when they tell us we can play, we'll play, and we'll play hard.

As you get older as a coach, you only focus on the things you can control. I've tried to get better at that. Not good at it all the time, but yeah, didn't really think much of it. Really good job by the administrators here in the tournament of communicating and all of that, and really the hat tip of the whole thing is to the fans for being here at 2:00 and ready to go. That's the earliest I've seen them in the ballpark for a game, which is awesome.

Then to stick out a long day. That's the loudest I've ever heard this stadium is when we took the field for the first inning tonight. That was special.

Q. Jay, I think you mentioned earlier this week that you've never had a pitcher where you just know what you're going to get from him going into the game. What has Paul Skenes meant to this program the last year, and to have that kind of performance from him tonight.

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't think you can quantify it. I

think this has been a couple years in the making, from a different school to here. The Friday night, the Saturday night, the 12 to 13 strikeouts a game, the three to four hits, the 1 or 2 run up on the board and to be able to count on that at the level we play and the schedule we play, maybe somebody has done it before, I just haven't really seen that. Stephen Strasburg is the only competitor as far as just execution and talent and domination that I've said to this.

Our team plays better because of him in terms of the physical performance, but we'd be here all night if I talked about the person. They don't come around like that. This is A+ human being and character as it gets, and that's why the talent ascends to the level that it has. We're talking Michael Jordan-type stuff.

Q. Six home runs tonight, 132 on the year, which ranks third all time in program history, I believe. With those 90 teams, I think a lot of people thought that wouldn't happen again when the bats changed. Can you give your perspective on those kind of numbers and what it means going into the climax of the season?

JAY JOHNSON: Well, it means a lot, and I won't get into the historical context a whole lot, but this is the gorilla ball program. I think about the teams that achieved those that maybe this team is close to. Those are college baseball legends, from Coach Bertman to Eddy Furniss, man, Todd Walker. I'm sure they were part of those home run-barrage teams. That's pretty cool.

I'm a baseball guy. I'm a college baseball guy. I had no idea. But that's pretty cool. Relative to these guys, there's talent, there's real talent on that field, obviously. There's a lot of hard work, both in the weight room and the batting cage, mentally, vision-wise, approach-wise, and they just -- it's our deal. It's our deal. We work really, really hard at it.

A lot of them it's been for two years, and it's really exciting to -- there's been a lot of nights like tonight with this team. I think we have more double-digit run games than anybody in the country this year, or close, and they're relentless at doing the things they need to do to perform like that, and it's fun to watch when it happens like tonight.

Q. It seems like some of these players like Josh Pearson, Tre' Morgan are really hitting their stride. Not that they haven't before, but in postseason ball. Why is that, and why do you think they're excelling right now at the right time?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, it's a great question. I think when I think about those guys, I think about just the baseball part

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

of it. They're both very pure hitters, but there's a competitive element to those two that is very unique.

I never worry if either of them are ready to play, if either of them are lacking confidence. That doesn't happen with those guys. I love left-handed hitters. Those guys are very pure hitters. They've done what we've asked them to do. They're prepared, and you're right, it's their time. They're playing like it's their time.

Q. I think you said earlier tonight during the broadcast that you hope that recruits and other players are watching because this environment and this kind of stuff doesn't happen all too often across college baseball. Can you talk about what you think the impact of this particular team can have on the future of the program you're building here?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah. I think it's a special team. No question about that. I think anytime I've had a team that's been successful, what I try to do is take the things that were good from that team and emulate them in the program going forward. Really old players in some cases. We have some future major league players. We have some young players that have really contributed to their success, but it's not quite their time right now.

We have great leadership. The two guys up here are a big part of that.

I think it will have a long-term impact on it. There's guys I believe we could interchange that haven't played a whole lot lately, and the result wouldn't be that much different because of their talent.

If I'm a young player out there, whether it's a high school player or a transfer portal, and I look at that stadium tonight, and I look at the energy in the ballpark, and I look at that and I go, like that's a baseball team. If I want to be a major league player and I want to play in environments where you have a chance to go to the College World Series, this place is at the top of my list.

We're going to keep trying to facilitate that.

Q. Did you have any role in lobbying for the delay, and now that we're at the back end of this, is there anything that can be learned from it to be a little bit more proactive in such a lengthy delay and making those decisions earlier in the day so people aren't here waiting it out?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, I'm very comfortable with the process of what happened. This is as professionally run a tournament as there is in college athletics. I don't

have any knowledge of what the college football playoff looks like, but I would guess things are very, very similar.

We have a great committee or great administrators on the site. I think it's good that they have discussions with us. I think the communication was fine.

The largest window of lightning was at 3:00 p.m. today if you looked at it, and it was looked at from every angle. The enable weather service was on a call with myself, my sport administrator, their coach, their sport administrator, all the games committee, and if you listened to that call, there would probably be a greater understanding of why we didn't start the game.

I'm very comfortable with it, and as I said earlier, this is a big job, and this is an important job. Therefore, I focus on what I can control, which is the preparation of my team when they say go. They didn't say go until 9:06. We tried a couple times, but it wasn't going to work. If we're about safety, then we need to be about safety. If we're about fairness, we need to be about fairness. I'm comfortable with all of that. I appreciate being communicated to in the fashion we were by the people from the NCAA. I appreciate having the opportunity to listen to an expert at the weather, and I'm very comfortable with how the process played out.

With that being said, as I said earlier, the stars of the delay are those fans out there in the purple and gold because they didn't get discouraged or distracted by it. They showed up, and they showed up in a big way.

Q. What do you think was the biggest difference between this start and the last time Paul faced Kentucky? What do you think were the adjustments that were made?

JAY JOHNSON: Well, in the last one he struck out 13. In this one he only struck out nine. It's different games, different time. There's a lot to it. I don't really want to elaborate on that just because I'd have to really go back in my memory bank and go, like April 14th, what happened. I don't know if that's the exact day, but I feel like that was pretty close.

I think he executed beautifully tonight. I think the execution of everything in the zone or near the zone was much better tonight than it was in that start. He had a few bigger misses in the last start, which allowed them to see the ball better when he was in the zone. He didn't miss very far off tonight. So they had to make a decision every single pitch. When you're having to make a decision on a 101 mile-an-hour fastball and that slider, good luck.

Q. I imagine your team doesn't have to be reminded of the series against Kentucky last time. You guys pounded them pretty good and they came back and gave you a tough time the last two games. What are your expectations of Kentucky given what you've seen of them all season?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, great team, has had a great season. Not surprised they're here. When I saw the brackets, I was like, if we advance, this is who we're going to be playing.

Old team, competitive team. They have a lot of pitching. I expect a dogfight where we'll have to play well to win tomorrow.

Q. Who gets the last call on those weather decisions whether you delay the game or not?

JAY JOHNSON: The NCAA.

Q. How does the one-game playoff mentality factor into one game to go to Omaha?

JAY JOHNSON: Well, I think it's been a good formula for us because the same things -- again, as crazy as it sounds with the result, what that would mean, the same things we need to do to beat a Kentucky or somebody in the SEC in April and May, they're the same things tomorrow. These guys have the maturity to understand that. You heard the word "execution" from those guys like five times tonight. They know what it's about. That's why they're here in this program, because they have talent and they have the right mind.

That's why you've seen it show up a lot. They know what they need to do.

Like I said, I believe last week, the motivation deal is not an issue.

Q. Would you say that the mental part is sometimes more important than the physical part because if you're not right with your head, you can't play the best?

JAY JOHNSON: Yes, and I'll just go back to my first team meeting whether I got the job. I was like, we're going to work on mindset every day in this program. It's so important in this sport, and to achieve at a high level, you have to create some type of advantage. We have great talent, but it's still about the team that plays the best and your outlook and how you frame things to get to peak performance is really important. It's absolutely really important, especially at this time of year.

