

# College World Series: Baton Rouge Super Regional

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Darren Williams

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 8, Kentucky - 3

COACH MINGIONE: Congrats to LSU on a well-played game, amazing season. They played great. Really proud of the group of men that I have in our program. A lot of you know, second time we've ever even been to one of these.

I think you guys could see how tough and gritty, unselfish, how much they love Kentucky, how they're willing to do whatever it takes to win. And I feel bad I couldn't help lead them to do something that's never been done before in the history of our program.

But these group of men have changed our program forever. And I'm forever grateful for them, including the guy to my left, who, on his visit, his main question was, Coach, what is it going to take to host a Regional at Kentucky Proud Park.

It wasn't about scholarship money or about NIL opportunities. It wasn't about any of that. His whole goal was, what's it going to take to host a Regional at Kentucky.

He's a great example of what a real man should be like and what it's like to be unselfish. And I'm thankful for him and the group of men that I had the opportunity and privilege to coach this year.

**Q. Could you address just how difficult it is to negotiate this lineup when they get to the bottom and then the top two or three guys coming up follow, if you can't get out at the bottom?**

DARREN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I mean, their 1-2 is as good as anybody ever maybe. They're one of the most talented teams I've seen in my seven years. So kudos to them. They played a heck of a two ballgames offensively. And good luck to them the rest of the way out.

**Q. This has been a long ride for you. I know this didn't finish the way you wanted it to. But reflecting on this past year the opportunity to host the Regional at Lexington and to come down here this weekend, what's it been like for you?**

DARREN WILLIAMS: The dream, man. The dream. A year ago I couldn't throw. I couldn't even throw a baseball a year ago.

And to be able to do what this team did, I'll never forget it. Nobody picked us at all at the beginning of the year. And just the togetherness, the grittiness, unselfishness, like Coach always talks about. It's so true.

That team loves each other, tight group, on and off the field. The dream season -- what a Kentucky kid wants to do if he plays for Kentucky.

**Q. Certainly during this Regional and the lead-up to it, everything like that, Coach here is constantly not talked about himself. He's put it on what it's meant to you guys, the program, the state of Kentucky, Mitch Barnhart. But for you as a player, what does it mean to have delivered the kind of seasons you have for him?**

DARREN WILLIAMS: Means the world. Me and Coach, we've only known him for two years now. Hell, I've played against him. So we've gotten so tight.

One of the most influential men in my life, not just a good coach, a hell of a person. One of the best human beings I've ever met. And when I tore my elbow last year, he was just as emotional as a family member, man.

So he means the world to me. I'm sure we'll stay close forever.

And, man, we really wanted to win. He lets us control the locker room, like I said last week. He's not some crazy psycho coach that you've seen videos of before -- genuine, honest to you.

I've enjoyed every minute for it. I've loved to play baseball for that man. I wish I could do it again. I've had a hell of a



two years with him. I appreciate everything he's done for me.

**Q. Coach mentioned this program is forever changed. For you, how does it feel to know you were part of that? And how did it change? I know you're going to be gone, but what does it change for this program to be able to reach this level of success, and how does it continue?**

DARREN WILLIAMS: I think last year, going back to week two of SEC play Cole Stupp hurt his elbow on Friday night. Week three of SEC play I hurt my elbow. Week four Tyler Bosma hurts his shoulder.

We were down a whole weekend rotation. In this league you don't come back from that you don't have any success after that. And what we did in the last month of the 2022 season, coming together with unselfishness, nobody cared what their role was anymore. They just wanted to win, somehow find a way to win.

We took a series from number one Tennessee, one of the best teams I've ever seen, probably one and two between the team we just played tonight. Then we won another series against Auburn, a team that went to the College World Series.

Then we made the best run a 12 seed has ever made in Hoover last year. That changes a program. And Coach recruited specific kind of guys for this year's team out of the transfer portal last year who just wanted to win. All they cared about was winning.

And that's what it takes in baseball. It's a team game. You need 1 through 27 to buy in, not care about roles, just want to win for the guy next to you. That's how we won 40 games this year.

**Q. Sort of the same question I asked Darren, I know these past couple of weeks brought a lot of emotion out of you even, and getting to this point, something you did back in 2017, again, with this specific group of guys what has all of this meant?**

COACH MINGIONE: You know, as a coach, you spend more time with them than you do your own family. And parents entrust us with their most prized possession. And when you get an opportunity to be around a group of men that are like that unselfish, they literally like don't give days away. You ask them to do something and they look you in the eye and they're, like, yes, sir. It's just rare. It's not common.

And Darren had nice words to say about me, but they're

the ones that do everything. And when you get an opportunity to be around people like that every day, it's like I can't tell you how many times I'm, like, this team's unbelievable.

Kristin (phonetic) would ask me, hey I was practicing (indiscernible). Kristin, I don't know how we could have had a better practice. We pushed them. We challenged them. They didn't succeed at times. They don't whine or complain or make excuses. It's just not normal. It's not normal.

And, yeah, I've got some really nice compliments from coaches and people around the league about the team, about how tough they are, 1 through 9, how they battle with two strikes, how we have so many weapons out of the bullpen and you can go to them.

It's just not normal to be around that many guys that are that unselfish and just really care about winning. And it showed.

The hardest part about it is I don't get to be around them anymore. Man, that hurts as much as anything.

**Q. Following up on what I asked Darren. You just talked so much about what this meant for so many other people other than you when you were just asked this. What did you feel you learned about yourself as a person, as a coach through this whole season?**

COACH MINGIONE: I've really grown and learned a lot as a coach. I've made good decisions. I've made bad decisions. One thing I believe in is feedback. And feedback is the breakfast of champions. I have called former players. I've picked their brain.

They've shared some tough things with me that I didn't want to hear but were true. And I've tried to make adjustments and become a better coach.

And the players are the ones that make coaches look good. We don't do the pitches. We don't take swings in the box. We don't do any of that. They're the ones that do all that. And they've made our coaching staff look really good. But they're really the ones that have done it all.

**Q. Did you come into the Super Regional, did you think there was any kind of weakness LSU had that maybe you could exploit? Did they do something better in this Super Regional than you thought they were going to do?**

COACH MINGIONE: Guys, you know this, but Jay Johnson is an amazing coach. He's an amazing coach.



You look at his track record, and everywhere that guy goes, they win and they win championships. I first ran into him at the NAIA College Series. He was at Point Loma Nazarene and I was at Embry Riddle. Played against each other in World Series.

Couple years later we're out working a baseball camp in Las Vegas, Nevada, of all places and he's at USD and I'm at Kentucky. I'm the volunteer coach. And we chatted and we talked. We've been friends ever since.

And we have followed each other. I check on him throughout the year. Every game, every single day I check on his team. And everywhere that guy has been he's won -- everywhere, everywhere. And LSU is lucky to have him. I really believe that with all my heart.

He's not just an amazing coach, he's an amazing evaluator, he's an unbelievable tactician. He's a great recruiter. And that lineup is really long. That's a really long lineup.

And those guys at the bottom -- Jobert, Thompson and Pearson -- have done really well for them. If you go back and look, they were responsible, even last night, I counted, I think it was seven of the 14 runs, half of their runs. That bottom of that lineup is really good.

It's hard to exploit much of them. They're a super well-rounded team. And there aren't many weaknesses there, no.

**Q. You said the program's been changed forever. How has that happened? How does it continue? I know you want to host one of these Supers. Obviously, that's the next step. What does the program do to really keep it going?**

COACH MINGIONE: Obviously we needed to build off of this. The way you do that, and you know this, but we were this close to being a national seed. We were a couple wins away.

And I said at our media day at the beginning of the year how I wanted to get our program to where we were on the other side of that. I was tired of being 1 and 2 and short of even making the postseason.

And I've been fortunate enough to be in the postseason a lot in my career. I've had some success. I was just, like, man, we just gotta get there and I know we can do something.

But we've been to two Regionals in the last six years and we've never been to one ever. So we're trending in the

right direction.

But we'll see what happens with the draft. We'll see what happens with guys making decisions about the transfer portal and things like that. But we definitely have some holes to fill.

I haven't spent a ton of time on that because we've been playing and I've been focusing on these guys. But we're close. It's not far off. We're really close. And these next two, three, four, five, six, eight weeks will help determine how the Wildcats will be next year.

**Q. Feels like Mason really kind of blossomed into a superstar over these past two weeks. Can you just talk about maybe if you saw this coming? Obviously 14 and a third scoreless innings against that kind of competition, it's a big deal.**

COACH MINGIONE: It's amazing. One of the things we asked our guys to do is empty their tank. And going back to last Friday we had a lot of guys empty their tank, and he's one of them. He's as good a arm as I feel anyone's coming out of anyone's bullpen. I feel that highly of him.

That guy had a chance to come back, a lot of opportunities. And give them credit; they denied him. Super talented. He's a guy obviously we're going to need back next year, and be counting on in a big way.

And his slider has gotten so much better. The fastball movement has been there. The slider is better. The changeup is there. And he gives a lot of peace when he's in the game, I know that.

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