

College World Series: Baton Rouge Super Regional

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Riley Cooper

Cade Beloso

Dylan Crews

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 8, Kentucky - 3

COACH JOHNSON: Wow, first off, thanks for your patience. That's special out there and did not want to rush off the field. And so proud of this team. Coming here was a big move, personally, and professionally just had a vision of what tonight would look like. And I wanted these guys to experience that so bad.

This is about the players. And whether it's culture, team, buy-in, connectedness, whether it's baseball, there's been a lot of blood, sweat and tears put in the bucket over the 700-whatever days we've been here. And they're champions.

And really excited to go to Omaha and chase a national championship with them. And if they are in character, we'll have a great chance to do that.

Q. Riley, tonight was your longest scoreless streak by relievers in an SEC game this year, SEC team. Can you talk about you all coming up clutch like that in that situation, you had to shut them down?

RILEY COOPER: Felt great to do. And if I would say if we had a crutch all year it would be the bullpen. It was good to show that that's not our crutch and that we can hold our own.

Q. Cade, your last AB in the box. Not your last but your last in the box and you hit a three-run bomb. What did it mean to you to go out like that?

CADE BELOSO: I mean, it means everything. I was just so happy we won the game today. In that at-bat I was just

trying to hit a fly ball to center field, and ended up getting a good pitch over the heart of the plate and put a good swing on it. That gave us a lead.

That was what I was really excited about. Anytime you have momentum in postseason it's huge. It was on our side after that. That's what I was really excited about.

Q. Dylan, seemed like everyone watching you in the 9th inning, bases loaded, tense game, that you would come up and it would be a situation like that. What did it seem like to you after all the walks and everything and you know your team needed a big hit at that time to try to put away a scrappy team like Kentucky?

DYLAN CREWS: I was just trying to control myself during that AB. There was a lot of emotions and a lot of things going on in that situation. So throughout my training, with our mental coaches here, and Coach Jay has really helped me out with this too, just controlling myself, controlling my breath, really.

And I was just trying to get a good pitch to hit going up there. I walked, I think, four times previously. So it's just trying to get something good to hit. Not trying to expand. I was able to do that and score two runs for the team.

It was awesome. Just passing it on to the next guy. It was good.

Q. You expressed to me on the field that you were nervous in that at-bat. Have you ever been nervous here at all?

DYLAN CREWS: I mean, I have before. I'm not going to lie. I'm nervous for every at-bat, really. But through all my training, like I said, I was just able to control myself and control my breathing. And it didn't make it any better when my walk-up song was playing.

But it was awesome. It was good. I think a spark hit us late in this year which is great timing. We've just got to keep moving forward with this momentum we have.

Q. Do you guys feel you're playing at your peak?

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Really felt like this weekend, last two weeks you guys have put together really solid baseball overall.

RILEY COOPER: I think we're firing on all cylinders. Everything's clicking. And I think it's all the hard work we've been doing through the whole year, it's finally come about.

DYLAN CREWS: No doubt. I think it was a spark that hit. When we lost the tournament, really got together and told everybody it's time to go. And I think we could definitely see the shift in our approaches and our mental approaches. So it's been great. Been good.

Q. Dylan, I saw you share a long embrace with Tommy White who you barely even knew last year. Can you talk about your relationship with him and how that's morphed throughout the season?

DYLAN CREWS: I love Tommy. He's awesome. Just a great kid. Great kid. One of the best hitters I've ever seen in my entire life.

To come here with all the expectations that he has and had and to see what he's been doing here at LSU with all the fans and all the expectations, it's been awesome to see.

And he's a guy next year, so we're all, all three of us are going to pass the torch on to him and I'm excited to see what he does in the future.

Q. Cade, your last home game you started the party with a home run. Can you talk about that hit, it was an 0-2 pitch?

CADE BELOSO: Yeah, it was an 0-2 heater right down the middle. That guy was doing a really good job of sinking and running the ball away from lefties. I finally found one I could stay behind and put a good swing on.

I don't know what happened after that. I'd be lying if I told you I remembered. I kind of blacked out. Once I saw the ball go over the fence, I kind of just blacked out.

Q. Dylan, when interviewing Skenes, he said you were one of the reasons he came to LSU. What are your thoughts on Paul just that statement?

DYLAN CREWS: He's the best pitcher I've ever seen in my life. To see what he's been doing here at LSU, it's been remarkable. I don't think that kid should be here. I think he should be pitching for a Major League team right now.

I've learned so much from that guy, just the mental

approach, how he carries himself every day. It's been awesome to play alongside of him. I'm really excited and very proud of him, and really looking forward to see what he's going to do in the future. It's going to be awesome for him.

Q. Riley, you came in as a transfer last year, and there were a bunch more transfers this year. What's it about this team to make those transfers like you feel at home?

RILEY COOPER: I know for me, right when I got here I felt welcome and felt at home. And the others, I'm sure, feel that way, too. I think that's just what we were able to do and help us win.

Q. Riley, you're probably in a pretty unique position here being one of the only guys who have made this trip and made it with Coach. What do you tell the guys in the next couple of days about what to expect and from that experience you had a couple years ago?

RILEY COOPER: It's still just baseball -- nine innings. And it's just a game at a time and don't look too far ahead.

Q. Dylan, this entire season your coach has had the mentality of one game at a time leading up to this moment right now. Do you say that's what's gotten to this moment right here right now?

DYLAN CREWS: For sure. That's been our motto since day one: One pitch at a time. When you think about it, really, it just kind of breaks down the game in the best way possible, really.

You just control the strike zone, control the offensive line in baseball, good things will happen at the end of the day. I think what we're doing right now is very good and very special. And we're trying to carry it forward in Omaha.

Q. Could you address your relief pitching and how it's progressed from the year from all the injuries? And down the stretch how it all came together and tonight it really held the rope?

COACH JOHNSON: I think we definitely had some challenges with Grant going down the Friday before the season, with Chase and Garrett going down. And they were pitching as good as you could. They were two of the best relievers in the SEC through three weekends.

We just kind of stayed at it. I think the Mississippi State Sunday game, that was tough. But if you look from that point forward, from that point forward -- McNeese on Tuesday, the Georgia series, the SEC Tournament,

Regional, Super Regional -- I'd say it's been the strength of this team.

I never doubted the talent. I think we just needed to help them get lined up a little bit better mentally. I think the two things that we really focused on were making sure that they were ready to get the first hitter out when they come in the game. Like, we're bringing you in to get that guy out to start with.

And when something goes wrong, just to be able to reset and get to the next pitch. And the two guys who pitched tonight, they pitched tonight because they're winners. I mean, it's no accident that big boy has been to Omaha twice and has pitched there and helped us get there twice. I mean, I think that's the second Super Regional win for him.

And with Gavin, man, that dude is something else. He's got "it." And I was joking the other day but after the news with Wes broke, after we won the Regional, he popped his head in my office, doesn't matter who is calling the pitch, I'll strike everybody out anyways. Have a good night. See you tomorrow.

Takes some kind of confidence to do that. Those guys are special. Great performances all the way through for the bullpen down the stretch.

Q. I'm sure you were asked this two years ago when you took this job but with some perspective, how did President Tate and athletic director Woodward pitch this job to you? And what does it mean now to be in the College World Series two years after that?

COACH JOHNSON: It means a lot. It started right after kind of the heart break of losing in the College World Series. The opening game in 2021, I mean we had the lead against Kumar Rocker and Vanderbilt late. And we played great that night. And it was a tough loss in extra innings. And got eliminated by Stanford.

And then they approached me and said, hey, what do you think about this? And probably wouldn't have gone anywhere else. But the gentleman sitting back there, Coach Bertman, made this the place.

I thought, wow, this is a once-in-a-lifetime, once-in-a-career opportunity and dream come true, to be part of this with him and all his great players and Ben McDonald and Todd Walker all the great assistant coaches.

I'm 12 years old, I had a LSU baseball hat on in Northern California and watching the purple jerseys run around Omaha all the time.

To get to coach this team in the College World Series, I've had a hard time to put that into words, but it's pretty special.

Q. Gavin Guidry, you had two guys rolling up in the bullpen. What went into the decision to leave him in for that ninth inning?

COACH JOHNSON: I mean, it got hard in a good way at the top of the ninth was like 45 minutes long. You have to account for everything. And we have first and goal on the 5-yard line. We're winning tonight. No doubt about it in my mind.

But the way they just weren't getting swings on him whether it was right or left and the breaking ball. And then once we scored I felt like we had some margin for error. And so you put them back out there.

The moment obviously wasn't too big for him -- as Coach Bertman talks about, he's past the pressure barrier. For me, the situation never becomes bigger than him executing his plan. We did that.

It allows us to leave Nate and Thatcher down there. If you look at it, if something had really gone wrong you've got Thatcher and Nate, you've got Javen Coleman for tomorrow. And our offense, I think we would have been okay. All that played into running them out there for the last inning.

Q. You shared a moment with Ty Floyd after this game. What was that moment like for you?

COACH JOHNSON: I'm so proud of him. There was a point last year, and I know exactly when it was, and he was struggling a little bit because this guy's talented. And we needed him to believe in himself kind of equating to his talent.

And I just brought him in and said you're going to pitch, you're going to pitch a lot. And we'll take the reins off and I just want you to go for it. And he did. He finished the year great for us. Beat Hurston Waldrep in a Regional and he's pretty good, last year.

I asked him to come out of the pen early this year because of the injuries thing. And it may not seem like a big deal now, but first Sunday of the year he closed three innings against Kansas State, closed. And it became evident we need to just put you to Saturday and go for it.

Because Paul has been so out-of-this-world good, I think people have really missed how good a season Ty Floyd

has had. I think about a lot of Coach's teams, there was that big name Friday guy. But there was always a guy on Saturday who was like 10-1, you know what I mean? That's what he's been for us.

I could have left him out there. I had a good feeling about Riley, where we were in the lineup, not letting him see Ty the third time through.

But I'm so proud of him. I thought today was a good outing. Last week before the lightning delay was a good outing. And you just keep stacking them up. And that's kind of flipped us to be in the position we are right now.

Q. What do you think you've learned in your first couple trips to Omaha that you think can really help this team out this go-around?

COACH JOHNSON: I think for tonight they have to enjoy this tonight. Like tomorrow morning I'll be guns blazing: Who are we playing; what day are we playing; what time; practices lined up at Creighton and all those types of things.

I think you want them to enjoy getting to the College World Series. I mean, outside of Cooper and Bryce and Christian Little, none of these guys have been there. They need to enjoy this.

Then you start moving into the last couple of weeks haven't been by accident. We have prepared at an elite level. I mean, the last two weeks have been awesome, like, back to training camp.

January is my favorite time of year, because we're, like, guns blazing. That's what the last two weeks have been. We're going to have a good practice Tuesday. Wednesday we'll fly out there. We'll practice there on Wednesday. Practice in the stadium on Thursday.

So enjoy all those things that come along with it. I have no worries about their self-discipline of turning it on when the lights come on.

They're salivating at the bat rack to get to the plate. Everybody wants to take the ball. And, so, I said this before, or going into last night, the things that we needed to do to win tonight are the same that won us 47 games before that. And it's no different at -- it's not Ameritrade anymore, Charles Schwab Field. Sorry, I was about ready to say Rosenblatt.

It's the same things. They know what they need to do to prepare. They know what they need to be when they need to be it. And that gives me great confidence in how we'll

take the field on Saturday.

Q. Not even Skip was supposed to win the national championship in his first or second year, but you were kind of supposed to go to Omaha pretty early. So do you feel like relief now, personally?

COACH JOHNSON: No. This was about the 35 or 38 guys on my team. And them getting to dogpile on this field. Cade Beloso and Gavin Dugas have been here for five years, been through a lot. They deserve to play there.

If I said I felt relief, that would be taking away what this is really about. And that's the players working, all the blood, sweat and tears in the bucket, for this opportunity.

And I'm really just happy for them. I'm happy for our program. I'm so honored to be here. I'm happy for the fans. Talk about an unbelievable performance. And Dylan hit the double. That topped last week. That topped last week, as far as the stadium.

And I just love how everybody's behind us. It makes me happy that they're happy that they can pack up the motor home, RVs, hop on a flight, get up there and hang out in Nebraska for 10, 12 days.

Q. I overheard one of those videos that -- many videos they do they put on social media, that you tell the team early in the season you'll take a picture after every game and there will be lots of pictures. Did you have in mind what this picture and what it might look like and where you might put it? Can you share any of those things with us?

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, you mean the picture after we win the game? I had 2023 on my mind when I came here. Dylan Crews was a large reason I accepted this job. I would have come anyways because of Coach, what he did. But that's a special player. That's a generational player. To get to coach him for two years, we worked our way through some things we just had to improve last year. We won 40 games.

Played in a Regional final against a team that's still playing today. And it's almost like two years have been wrapped into one. I'm really proud of what these guys accomplished in terms of the amount of wins now getting to Omaha.

A rain-out away from winning an SEC championship, which may be harder to do than winning a national championship. This is all now about seizing the opportunity, and excited to practice on Tuesday. And get them lined up and go for it.

Q. (Off microphone).

COACH JOHNSON: He's a special coach. He's one of my best friends in the world. When the bracket came out, it was almost like, could it have been somebody else? Could it have aligned -- this is our third Super Regional that we've won. I've played against his team twice. And I just told him after the game that I love him. I think he did the best coaching job of anybody in the SEC this year. Hands down. No question about it.

They know how to play. They know how to win. Their pitchers know exactly who they are, how to execute it. They know exactly the style of offense that they are, and they play it great.

We just had a little more firepower. We had this behind us, the Coach Bertman monster behind us. I just told him, some day Kentucky will play in Omaha and hopefully LSU will be in Omaha at the same time. That would be awesome.

If for some reason we're not, I will be there supporting him and his team. He's a special dude. He's a special competitor. He's a great coach and a great human being.

Q. Josh Pearson said this is the most fun he's ever had this season. What do you think has made it so fun?

COACH JOHNSON: I think the guys, they're just so invested. I mean, we chose all of them. I mean, there was a tipping point last year where it's like, hey, man, if you're going to be on this roster in 2023 -- great person. Good player. Great character. All these guys that are still here, we chose them to be here right now. We chose a bunch of them to join forces with them. And then it was this thing of, like, wow, that's a pretty good roster, how are you going to manage all that?

They made this a no-drama deal. We are a team in every sense of the word. They love each other. They support each other. We've had guys start and then get taken out of the lineup that had the biggest smiles on their faces. We had guys that weren't playing that were playing. And it hasn't mattered who. It's just been LSU. Us. Our team. We. I think it's really uncommon nowadays.

Young people, they just think about themselves before they think about anybody else. These guys have always placed the needs of the team above their own. That's what I'm the most proud of.

Q. Didn't seem like Ty totally had his breaking ball today. How did he sort of navigate that and sort of

fight through that today?

COACH JOHNSON: Winners win. And he's a winner. And he has this knack of -- he's given something up in the first inning in a few starts and then found a rhythm. We didn't get into the sixth inning today, but he got us ten outs and then handed it over to somebody that's completely different than him that got us ten outs, and then turned it over to somebody that was completely different than both of them, got us seven outs with us scoring more than the other team.

Winners win, and Ty's a winner. We've got to do one more. Can't have a bad breaking ball question in this thing. No offense.

Q. What was your message to the guys going into the ninth inning? You still had a tight lead.

COACH JOHNSON: So we don't have a bunch of signs or sayings up. There's a few. If you walk out of the hallway down into the dugout, the big one says "One pitch at a time."

And what we've tried to do is get them to just master living in the moment. Everybody knew what was on the line today. But it feels so much better to accomplish it when you've invested everything the right way. And they're talented. It's all going to come back to play. So just staying focused, being present, that's what makes them special. That's what makes talented guys play great quite a bit. It's a really good record right there against a hellacious schedule. But nothing has ever been too much for them. And they kept forging forward with a little adversity. And they're champions.

They've earned the right to go play for a national championship. And saying that is probably the thing that gets me the most. They've earned the right to go play for a national championship, and that's what we intend on going and going for it. And I will not promise we'll win it, but everything will be invested by everybody to go do that.

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