

College World Series: Lexington Regional

Sunday, June 4, 2023
Lexington, Kentucky, USA

West Virginia Mountaineers

Coach Randy Mazey

J.J. Wetherholt

Tevin Tucker

Postgame Press Conference



TEVIN TUCKER: I would say it was a great season for sure. It was one I will never forget. Felt good to be back in the postseason. And I know they'll be back. Coach Mazey will have them back in a heartbeat.

But it was a great season. I loved every moment of it.

Q. When you look back at the season what you were able to accomplish personal development (indiscernible) what do you think you'll remember the most?

J.J. WETHERHOLT: Honestly probably just the whole Regional experience last year. We thought we did enough to make it to one, but we didn't get put in. So I think just going to one this year was really cool and gave us an opportunity to play at the biggest stage.

COACH MAZEY: I would be remiss if I didn't say, too, part of this season was having a guy that I feel is deserving of the Golden Spikes in J.J. He's -- the best season I've ever seen by a single player.

But beyond that, the type of teammate he is, the type of leader he is, what he does off the field is equally as impressive as what he does on the field. So I've never been part of a season like that. So kudos to J.J. for being a Mountaineer.

Q. What did Strickland do to get you off balance? And the first inning, barreled a couple balls, hit really hard but right at people. Does that build on itself and say, we're still hitting it, just not finding the gaps?

TEVIN TUCKER: That's baseball. We were putting some swings on balls, and, like you said, it was going right at people. But today he just made good pitches, enough to get him out of there. But that's baseball. It happens. But today he was just a better man.

Q. Any one particular pitch or just location or command?

TEVIN TUCKER: Probably his command, just mixing up pitches.

Kentucky - 10, West Virginia - 0

COACH MAZEY: As I just told the guys, there's only one team out there out of 64 that's going to not feel the way we do right now. Everybody loses their last game except for the last team standing.

So this is the worst day of the season for a lot of people, a lot of the time. And guys are hugging each other and crying and emotional. And I just told them in the huddle that once the emotion dies down of what happened today, then you'll realize what happened this season.

This was probably the greatest season in the history of West Virginia baseball. We ranked top 10 in the nation for the first time in I don't know how long, 50-some years.

We tied the single-season win mark at 40. We won the Big 12. And we have a Big 12 Championship trophy back at home that we're going to display forever. And we packed our stadium the second half of the season. We brought the community together like it's never been done before in our program.

So once the emotion of today dies down, I think these guys will realize, and a lot of people will realize, that this was one of the best seasons any team has ever put together.

And I told the guys, if anybody comes up to you in the next week or so and says, hey, man, what happened this year? Tell them exactly that. We were ranked in the top 10. We won the Big 12. Won 40 games and brought a community together. That's what happened this year.

Q. Can you talk about what this season meant for you and getting back since your freshman year?

Q. I know you don't like to talk about yourself personally but the .450 stat, (indiscernible) first player since Buster Posey to hit .450, what's that mean to you? Obviously as a baseball fan what's it mean (indiscernible)?

J.J. WETHERHOLT: I think it's definitely pretty cool. Honestly I think he makes that stat way better because everyone knows who Buster Posey is. It's something I didn't think would happen this year for me, at least, but it's definitely a really cool thing.

Q. J.J., you talked specifically about enjoying the Regional experience. Generally, what was the hospitality like for people here in Lexington for you guys?

J.J. WETHERHOLT: I think it was awesome. The whole rooming situation, everybody knows about that, blew it out of proportion. I think they did a great job trying to accommodate for us with all the events going on, and all the staff here was really awesome, made us feel at home. The games were just super fun and everything went smoothly outside. It was a great experience.

Q. The decision to start Grant, what was he struggling with?

COACH MAZEY: That's been our issue really the whole season, Sunday starter, Tuesday starter. We've tried so many guys and some guys had flashes of brilliance and earned some starts in those roles and some guys didn't. So actually put it out to a vote amongst the coaches yesterday, and three different guys got a vote for starting today.

That's why I say we really overachieved this year, to go into this season when your Friday starter and your Saturday starter both throw 84 miles an hour and you don't know who your Sunday or mid-week guy is, just keep winning and winning and winning and winning like we did is the reason I say we overachieved this year instead of underachieved.

So Grant didn't do anything wrong. He's a guy that's got to have tremendous fastball command down at the knees and he's a ground ball pitcher. If he's not giving up ground balls, then they're seeing the ball pretty well.

It's good that we got a lot of the freshmen in there, Maxx Yehl and Porco and those guys, that's going to be tremendous experience for them, Ben Hampton, in the future to go through this atmosphere and experience it.

Q. You and Tevin have had the opportunity to share two Regionals together now. What's that relationship meant to you and what has Tevin meant to this program?

COACH MAZEY: You love all the kids. There's not -- there's not a guy in uniform I wouldn't do anything for.

But I don't ever try and identify or like these kids because they're good players. I like them because they're good people. And you won't find a better person than Tevin Tucker. So when he's done fielding ground balls and stealing second base, our relationship will continue to grow.

Q. Going back to Greensboro, after the first pitch, they came out, talked to him. Is that similar to Oklahoma, where they were coming out there?

COACH MAZEY: Yes, the rules about wind-up and stretch and all that, there's so many different interpretations depending on the umpires you get.

One Big 12 crew will tell him you can't do this. You get in here, you get umpires from all over the country. And sometimes they don't like the way a kid does things so they make him change. Who knows. That didn't have anything to do with what happened, though.

Q. Last time you made a Regional, you didn't really get to follow it up because the season got canceled. How do you go to the offseason and go into next year with this group and follow up this year?

COACH MAZEY: Really, the only two guys who have exhausted eligibility are Blaine Traxel and Kevin Dowdell. So we conceivably could have this whole team back.

I feel Carlson Reed will be a pretty big draft pick. Who knows. But he may have an opportunity to move on. But this experience that these guys went through could be good for us next year because, like I said, we could have almost this whole team back.

And the job that my coaches and my staff and everybody have done to assemble this team and to keep this team together and coach this team and go through our team culture, and everybody around me has such a big part in the success that we've had this year, I guarantee you, my coaches are out there thinking right now how we're going to be better next year. And that's what they do. That's what we said after last year, when we thought we should have got in a Regional and didn't. Okay. Let's do what we've got to do to get in one. That's what we did.

Today we say, let's do what we gotta do to win one next year. We're going to work to make that happen.

Q. Obviously you don't have all your team as kind of a captive audience right now. You have a timetable of what you want to do to try to meet with all of them, talk to them about their plans? Obviously it's a quickly spinning process building your roster next year.

COACH MAZEY: In baseball it happens quick. We'll probably go home tonight and meet with everybody individually tomorrow and talk about future plans and what they've got to do to get better. And spend a little time with each guy and go over strengths, weaknesses and do all that. So yeah, it happens pretty quick.

Q. Obviously, as you mentioned, third Regional appearance in the last six years for you guys. Assess where this program is now versus when you took over in 2013 and (indiscernible) how you've been able to build it where it is?

COACH MAZEY: That's a question I can get on board with. You guys have heard me say this before, you local people, but when we joined the Big 12, what is it now, 11 years ago, everybody in our circle said, yeah, football, they'll be fine. And Coach Huggins, they'll be fine in basketball. They've got it going. But poor baseball. What's going to happen to the baseball program?

And that was just 10 years ago. And 10 years later here we are going to three Regionals and played in the Big 12 Championship in the tournament twice and have a trophy in our trophy case now for winning the Big 12 Championship.

So the last 10 years has been really, really good. And we've been ranked in the Top 25 now in parts of seven consecutive seasons.

And for West Virginia, the outlier in the Big 12, not anymore. Now Cincinnati and BYU and coming in. But for the outlier in the Big 12, with all of our challenges geographically and weather wise and travel wise, for us to do what we've done over the past 10 years is literally nothing but a tribute to the coaches that I've had out there assembling this team, the way they coached the kids, the culture that we have in our program, the blue-collar mentality we have in our program, the play-with-a-chip-on-your-shoulder mentality. That's how we've done it.

So the 10 years have been really good for us. I think the next 10 years can be even better. We've put ourselves in a position now that if you're a high school baseball player or

somebody thinking about going to play college baseball somewhere, West Virginia has been in the Top 25 for seven straight seasons. Why wouldn't I look at the Mountaineers?

We've gotten this program to that point. And I say I'm really proud of it. I say that because I'm proud of the people who are responsible for it.

Q. In the meetings with the players, what they need to work on and stuff like that, but a guy like J.J. who does everything extremely well, how do you approach an offseason with a guy like him? I know he's got USA camp coming up?

COACH MAZEY: You know he only hit .450, which means he makes more outs than he gets hits.

J.J. just needs to continue to be J.J. What adjectives can you use? What superlatives can you use to describe that guy? Nobody's ever been perfect at the game of baseball but he's as close as you can get. Nobody's, like you said, since Buster Posey hit that high in a college baseball season.

And he's a great defender, steals bases. He does everything you have to do. We just need to -- could you imagine if we had two or three guys like him in the lineup at the same time? That's the goal. So J.J. needs to just keep being J.J.

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