

College World Series: Lexington Regional

Sunday, June 4, 2023
Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Nolan McCarthy

Ryan Hagenow

Hunter Gilliam

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky - 16, Indiana - 6

COACH MINGIONE: Just really proud of our guys' toughness. Obviously to play two games in one day with your back against the wall and I think it was no more evident than the way our hitters stood in there and wore HBPs. How many times did we get hit? Nine times. Real toughness.

Love the grit of Logan Martin. Good to get him back out there. Obviously he started in the Friday night role and we've gone basically an entire season without him. To get him back, kudos to Logan, our training staff, our strength coach, everybody to get him back.

I thought Evan Byers was great. And Ryan Hagenow, just huge innings and outs for us.

Proud of their toughness. Proud of our toughness. I know you guys aren't surprised that we were able to do that. I can't say enough good things about them. I've been saying it all year and it was apparent today really how tough these guys are.

Q. Nolan, big day for you. What was your mindset -- like on the last month were you prepared for this opportunity to make (indiscernible)?

NOLAN MCCARTHY: I mean, we get tested every week. Just get a chance to get better every time I get an at-bat. And looked over to third base and Reuben was telling me, come get me in. And I just kind of shortened the swing down just so I could get the job done. Didn't take necessarily a big hit, just getting the ball in play.

Q. How infectious is it, you start off and it just snowballed. It's been a while since we've seen that kind of offense just how nice was it to have that going into tomorrow also?

NOLAN MCCARTHY: It's really good. We all know we can hit. We're a really good offense. We can do small ball and we can also leave the yard. I just think we've got everything going for us. Going into tomorrow we, just take gotta it one pitch at a time.

Q. It's viewed as being in a tough spot having to play two games in one day. Are there any advantages from being able to play two when you get in a good groove?

NOLAN MCCARTHY: It's tough playing 18 innings but I feel like we had the advantage going into the second game today because we'd already seen pitching. We already put up some good runs. I mean, we were just ready to go from the jump.

HUNTER GILLIAM: I think that 18 innings was good for us. It kind of got our groove back. And you've got a bunch of animals up there and we don't do tired. So 18 innings was nothing for the boys. We're ready to go.

Q. Hunter, baseball is funny because Indiana has the momentum. At this point you guys got (indiscernible) your momentum (indiscernible) scoring teams 26-6 today. How much do you believe it in it. How much (indiscernible) careful not to get trapped in baseball one game inning type of proposition?

HUNTER GILLIAM: I mean, momentum is cool and all. But this win expires when we wake up or when we go to bed tonight. So we're going to create our own momentum tomorrow. And that's the momentum we are worried about is pitch one tomorrow.

Q. Neither of you got hit today --

COACH MINGIONE: They didn't? Hold on. Let me check. (Laughter).

Q. (Indiscernible) you guys taken that part of the game



what's the mood in the dugout when (indiscernible)?

HUNTER GILLIAM: So we actually changed our BP up a little bit before the second game today. And we worked on some HBPs. And it's part of our game. And we feed off of it.

There's grown men up in that locker room who aren't afraid -- you could throw it 150 miles an hour and we've got dudes, I promise you, who will stand in there. It doesn't faze us. It fires up the boys and we love it.

NOLAN MCCARTHY: Kendall rolled some of the best BP out there. It was our last round. And we said, one guy up and he's throwing it at our legs and we're turning into it, gonna let it hit us. It's a free base. Why not take whatever they give us.

COACH MINGIONE: Is this not incredible, the unselfishness? They asked me about that this on air. Was that this your idea?

NOLAN MCCARTHY: That was Chase Stanke.

COACH MINGIONE: This is player driven. They're going to stand in there and in batting practice they're just going to get hit. Real baseballs or --

NOLAN MCCARTHY: Real baseballs.

COACH MINGIONE: Come on. This is not normal. This is not normal. Like, I've told you, these guys are very unselfishness.

Q. Just to follow up on Josh's question earlier, you kind of shared right field this year with your roommate. So what's that been like on supporting each other? And then coming into the tournament, did you feel like you being part of this (indiscernible)?

NOLAN MCCARTHY: James and I, we're really good friends. I mean, we're both pulling on the same strings. Whoever is out there, we just trust in each other that we're going to get the job done. Doesn't matter who it is. Because at the end of the day we're going to get the job done and we just have full faith in each other.

Q. Is there a technique to this practice of getting hit? Protecting your hands and --

HUNTER GILLIAM: Practice, there is a technique. We ask the BP thrower to just throw it at us and then there's about 10 guys behind the net fired up when one dude would wear one. It was pretty interesting. It's cool.

I've never been part of something like that. It was fun. We'll do it tomorrow.

NOLAN MCCARTHY: If anyone was tired before that second game, they were after they got hit. We're ready to go.

HUNTER GILLIAM: I love my team.

Q. Getting guys like Pat Herrera and everyone getting ABs, getting (indiscernible) bench. What's that like for you guys, in such a high-tense game tonight?

HUNTER GILLIAM: Those guys worked so hard. Man, it's unbelievable how many guys are on this team that just put in so much time. And some dudes don't get the at-bats, as many at-bats as they probably think they deserve.

And it's hard when you have 15 to 18 dogs out there. Their time is coming. See what Pat does when he gets out there. Everyone's just waiting for their turn. And Pat's a guy who -- he's in the cages an hour before practice every day working.

And it's a locker room full of guys like that. It's not shocking when they go out there and they get their hit. But it's awesome for us to see. We love it.

NOLAN MCCARTHY: If you could have seen Pat earlier this week, we did some live at-bats in inner-squads and he was putting balls in the gap every at-bat. I don't think he gave away an at-bat.

He really earned it and other guys like Ryder takes infield every day and this is might the first time he played shortstop. He takes infield every day. And he's played infield before, and he is just a dog. We've got a bunch of dogs.

Q. Hunter, seems like you've become a hard luck guy a little bit, like line drives right at people and warning track shots. How did it feel to kind of break through again?

HUNTER GILLIAM: We won. So that's all that matters. The luck and all that stuff, it doesn't really matter. I could line out a hundred times in a row. If the Cats win, that's all I'm looking for.

COACH MINGIONE: That answer don't get any better.

Q. You've been in this situation before here. You referenced you draw from that experience a little bit. How much did you draw on 2017 talking to these guys coming into today?

COACH MINGIONE: That was the message after the game. It was good news and bad news. The bad news was that we lost the game. And the good news is I have been here before and there's been guys before them that have worn our jersey and were able to get it done.

And sometimes -- I remember my coaches telling me something very similar in college and it just gave me peace to know, like, okay, my coach has got it. Ultimately they're the ones that have to make the plays. They're the ones that have to make the pitches.

But you guys, I gave them three things today. And this team's amazing. They could recite it back. I told them this morning that, number one, we had to have a never-ending pursuit just to win one pitch at a time. It would be really easy to look ahead and to think we have 18 innings. And this team is so special at that all year. But I told them that was number one.

Number two, we need today have a team and a dugout full of people that had a desire to win that dominated.

Number three, we had to empty the tank.

I told them that before the game. I told them after the first game. Told them that before the second game and after the second game. And proud of them. They did exactly that. They did exactly that.

Q. How easy was it for you to (indiscernible) just say go -- it's been a while since this team has done that for 18 innings offensively.

COACH MINGIONE: Against two really good teams. Obviously you heard the praise I gave for West Virginia. And Indiana is the same way. They're a great team. It's not easy to do it against that team.

I don't want to take that for granted because so many times you put up zeros. So I've just -- one thing I was proud of the guys, I just felt like every inning there was pressure. There was opportunity there. And, I want to do it more tomorrow.

Q. This is a less thought about thing but going through the losers' bracket you got to be home -- road tonight, home tomorrow you can't be walked-off your home field. Back in 2014 because I think (indiscernible) the winners' bracket, they lost the first game and then got walked off because of the switching. Like you never want to go through the losers' bracket. Is there a silver lining knowing final game you get home field and you can't be walked off

on your home field? And do you think the NCAA should change the home field rule for the host?

COACH MINGIONE: You bring up a good point. And I hadn't thought about that. But when you have an opportunity, when you're down and you get a chance to score, that's a good feeling because you feel like you still have a chance. I hadn't thought about the NCAA but I'll give that some thought.

Q. After a tough loss yesterday, the days are bleak -- Hunter sat up here and said it just means I get to play more baseball with my guys. What did that tell you when he said that?

COACH MINGIONE: I wasn't surprised. We did a really interesting deal with our team later in the year. There were talks late in the season about should we play games, should we not play games. And we just did a little exercise with our team, and we just asked them, should we play this game, should we not play this game?

It was neat to hear what the guys said. Our team, we say that we're a family. And Hunter stood up in front of our team and I thought he made one of the most impactful comments. And he said, guys, he said, I don't know how much baseball I have in my life. And there's no team and there's no group of men that I want to be around more than you guys. So I want to play as many games as we can. As many games.

And guys said that after yesterday's loss. They just said, guys, this just means we get to play more games together. And we're going to do this. And that's what they said. That's what they said.

And that's not created overnight. There's been a lot of guys that have helped our culture over the years. But this has taken time to get to this spot. I often say creating your team is a lot like a good meal in a recipe. You have to have a bunch of different ingredients to really make your team be one.

And to bring guys in from all over the country with all-over backgrounds, baseball backgrounds. But this team, they've just worked from day one. They've crushed it in the classroom. They've crushed it in the community. And they just really enjoy being around each other.

That's how you're able to do some of the things that we've done, but if they don't have a love and a care for each other, it does and it will not work. And they do. They do.

Q. What's your take on the -- seems like there were emotional exchanges between the coaching staffs last

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

night and what's your take and how do you balance the emotion going into tomorrow?

COACH MINGIONE: Guys, there's a lot at stake here. We're all playing for a lot of really important things. And when you have a group of competitive coaches, players, that happens.

So I give the umpires a lot of credit. I think they've done a great job handling and managing everything. So kudos to the umpires, you know. I think they've done a great job.

Q. You mentioned one of your messages to your team before this game was you have to empty the tank. Obviously hunter sat up here tonight and said that tonight's win expires at midnight going into tomorrow what's in the tank for you guys?

COACH MINGIONE: One of you guys asked a really good question about, hey, you have your back against the wall, could there be some advantages to having been there, done that. And our guys have. And I reminded them today before the first game that every team is going to be in this situation at one point or another.

The only team that wouldn't, you could potentially just maybe cruise through the Regional, Super Regional and into Omaha win your first game in the championship series and never have your potential back against the wall.

But at some point more than likely every team is going to go through this. And this is what they signed up for. This is what they signed up for.

And they've just done a lot of really good things. And they didn't back down today. They didn't back down today. And it will take the same thing tomorrow against a really good Indiana team.

Q. Seems like you've spurred your pitching well a little bit. Where do you stand for tomorrow's game?

COACH MINGIONE: To win a Regional, especially coming out of the losers' bracket you have to have depth. And I think that showed again today that we were able to roll through those games, to use the amount of arms.

And tomorrow will be all-hands-on deck. We'll have just about every guy. Hags will not be available tomorrow. But I think other than that, we'll have a lot of guys ready to go and toe the rubber back again. I feel good about where it's at. Sleep on it tonight. And see what we're going to do tomorrow.

Q. Tonight looked a lot more like the midseason we

saw the first part of the year. Getting him innings what makes it a big deal for the last few weeks SEC play and how big is that for him?

COACH MINGIONE: He's one of those guys, where you can give him the ball and he can go one, two, three -- did he get four and two-thirds today? He's that good and he's that talented.

So it was good to get him back out there and just let him go and just pitch. Sometimes he's been in a lot of different roles. But sometimes when we got him that lead and it was just good for him to just be able to go.

Q. Hunter and Nolan talked about being hit nine times that they were excited, kind of amped up. How do you control your players from going from excited to frustrated when it keeps happening over and over again?

COACH MINGIONE: You know, I think everybody's different there. And just like everybody, you know, handles things differently. Some of them get fired up. Some of them get mad. They all kind of handle it a little differently.

But I think they did a good job today. But if one guy goes too much the other way, we'll kind of coach him up. But I thought they did good today.

Q. There's been a lot of talk tonight about momentum. But there's also a baseball adage that momentum is as good as your next starting pitcher. You've been around this game a long time. Where are you on the theory of momentum of baseball?

COACH MINGIONE: I'm going to play the neutral card on that. I think you could say today you probably felt like we had momentum. I read Lou Holtz's book one day, it's called "Winning Every Day."

He gave the analogy, if my team is winning 21-7 and right before halftime the other team scores to make it 21-14, who has the momentum? You would say the other team. He's like, but what if it was a tie game and right before halftime I scored and we went in 21-14. Why do we have the momentum? It's the same score. It's the same score. Right? So I could play that one.

I thought our crowd was awesome today. Was it not? I mean, our people, the way they cheered for the strikeouts, just compliment the Big Blue Nation. And this is my plea to them to show up tomorrow. I would love to set a new record for attendance because it matters. It matters. And I believe we can do that.



One person that's not here tonight is Tim. I wanted to let Tim know that my thoughts and prayers are with him and Tracy (phonetic). A lot of you guys in this room know Tim and he's not here. But Tim, I'll be praying for you and Miss Tracy so please know that.

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