

2022 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, June 1, 2022
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Oklahoma State Cowgirls

Kenny Gajewski

Kelly Maxwell

Sydney Pennington

Chelsea Alexander

Postgame Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: This is the pre-tournament press conference featuring the Cowgirls of Oklahoma State. Oklahoma State is making its tenth trip to the Women's College World Series after having defeated Clemson in the Stillwater super regional.

We are joined by head coach Kenny Gajewski and student-athletes Kelly Maxwell, Sydney Pennington, and Chelsea Alexander. Coach, if you could just start us off and give us a little run-through on how the Cowgirls advanced to OKC again.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Okay. It's been a really interesting, fun journey for sure. I think for the first time we had some kind of real expectations I would say internally for sure and maybe outside as well, with the amount of talent that we had coming back and we had added.

Learned how to kind of manage that as the season had gone on or was going on, and seemed to be playing our best softball right now, which is probably the most important thing. Like these other seven teams, I think we're all the hottest eight teams in the country, and whoever can stay hot can manage this.

Had a good regional with the teams there and then had a chance to play Clemson. Obviously, a really good team with some really good athletes and very good coaching staff, so we escaped out of there, and we're here now. Can't wait to get started.

THE MODERATOR: Sydney, at the beginning of the year you guys had a little bit of up and down. Not bad, but a little bit. Then, like Coach said, really kind of turned it on. What did you see in this team that allowed you to go on a

big run at the end of the year and get to OKC?

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: I think at the beginning of the season we kind of took our maybe preseason rankings for granted a little bit.

We haven't had a super high ranking in the past years, so I think we saw that and we kind of were a little big-headed at first, and things weren't really going our way on the field.

We kind of had to have a little reset. I think just from there we really tried to do just the small things right, whether that was on the field or off the field. I think just by doing that we played better together on the field.

Now I just feel, like Coach G said, we're just getting hot and playing really good right now. No better way to peak than now, so excited.

Q. Coach, you know, when you got to Oklahoma State you had a little bit of building to do, and now you're at that point, like you say, where you came into this year with expectations. Can you just tell me about the process since you got to Oklahoma State to get to now where you are expected to be in Oklahoma City at this point in the year?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Well, I think when we got to OSU, we had to just -- let me back up here.

The most appealing thing about this job was the history at OSU. I remember taking my interview, and they kind of whisked me through the facility. I can remember saying, man, there's not much up in there about the history. There's not much up about what's gone on here.

So I just thought, man, we can do this. We have it here. It's hard to create, but we just needed to kind of dust ours off.

We came in from day one, and that's what we did. We tried to educate our kids on the history. Sandy Fischer and all the people that made this thing go. We slowly bought in, and by the season we were really bought in.



First two years we advanced to a regional final if game, which I think maybe shocked a few people. I don't know if it shocked us inside, but shocked a few people outside.

Had a little rough year in our third year. Obviously, made it to Arkansas. I don't think I was my best self that whole year.

Then from that point on, we really have just gone up, up, up. It's really been cool to watch. It's been a journey that I wish I had taken more notes, to be very honest. Just to go back and watch it and read about it from my own point of view, but it's a special place, and winning is something that all of our teams do.

We're just doing what our school does. We're just having a blast. We're doing it our way, and the results are there.

Q. Kenny, I got a two-parter for you about Miranda: First of all, I'm wondering if you have an update on if she might do any pitching this week, and secondly, I'm wondering if you have heard her talk at all about playing against her sister, Madi?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: The pitching part, I don't know. I'm going to give you the same answer. I see her trying to throw here and there. I've tried to just put it out of sight out of mind. If she walks up and says, I can pitch, we'll take a look and see.

Then as far as her sister, we have talked some. It's been kind of fun. I think these girls have talked to her about that as well. I think it's kind of cool.

I don't know how she feels. I haven't got that far with her, but I have just said, hey, this is kind of wild, the fact that they're here and we're going to be playing them in the first game. She goes, yeah, my -- I think it's her dad and her brother are going to be on Arizona side and her mom and her aunt are going to be on our side, trying to kind of make it fair.

I told them they don't have to make it fair. They can all be on our side, but we'll see where that goes.

Q. I hope I'm going to ask this right because all of these kids, everybody that's played for you has played a role in it. We haven't spoke to you since you got the contract extension, which obviously sends a message from the administration the high approval of what you and the program have done. Can you kind of address that and that message that's sent to you?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I don't understand it. I have said this, I don't understand why this is getting so much attention, but

it's because of them. I'm just reaping the benefits, I guess, of my staff and us. They're the ones who win. I'm just trying to drive the ship and kind of keep them on path.

I talked to Chad a couple of weeks back, a few weeks back. He said, hey, when the season is over, let's get together and talk. I've been extended almost every year I've been here, and I don't know if it's because there's a couple of jobs open that people -- my name seems to get circulated out there a lot.

I love OSU. This is where I want to be. It's home, so people are going to continue to call if we win, and it feels good. It's nice, but there's something about my job that is different than a lot of jobs. I get to go home and be at home. I get to still coach one of the top teams in the country. I get to -- I have a six-minute drive. These are things that a lot of you wish you had, and I have it. I get to see my kids some. I mean, I don't -- if I was at another school, there may be things where I would never see. I get to at least see them some.

When we start talking about all this stuff, Robert, I'm grateful. I'm appreciative. I love it here, and when Chad said he wanted to talk and do things, I'm, like, okay. We can wait. We don't have to do this now. I just think they wanted to jump out in front of it again.

I'm on my fourth or fifth amendment in seven years, so I think if people don't already know, we're serious about softball here. We're serious about golf. We're serious about wrestling. We're serious about tennis. We're serious about football, basketball, baseball. We're serious about everything, and I feel very lucky that I'm in this place.

Q. If I could ask this of Kenny and Sydney: A very cool night last night for Jules Callaham winning the Elite 90 Award. She's probably not somebody we're going to see a lot of on the field this weekend, but I'm wondering if you could both speak to what mark she's made on the team and this program.

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: Jules has definitely made her impact here on this program, and like you said, she hasn't seen a lot of the field, but she does everything she can for Cowgirl softball, and she's just one of those kids that just loves to be with her friends and her teammates and supports us. She's the loudest one in the dugout leading the cheers. She'll do anything for you. She's very energetic. She keeps the energy really high in the dugout, and there's just no one more deserving for that award. She works her butt off, and it shows. We're really proud of her, and it do that back-to-back is really incredible.

We're really glad she's on our team and helping us win a



National Championship.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I'll just echo what Syd said. I didn't even know what this award was until last year when we kind of got a heads-up right before our game that she was going to win the award, and I can remember going on to our bus when the game was over and looking at all this up, and I was, like, whoa, how come we don't know more about this?

Obviously, we're very aware now. We were just talking amongst our staff. We have to make a place in our offices for these awards for her. It's a special deal. I mean, this is what it is. This is why I think people love our game because these kids are still so pure, still so -- they're playing for the right reasons. They're full of joy. They're still student-athletes.

To see her achieve this again, I didn't think you could even win it again. None of us even knew what the rules were. Very proud of her. She comes from a really great family. They value education. They value some things like that, and it makes you feel very good.

Q. Chelsea, you and Kelly, when I was in Stillwater last week, there was a lot of consternation among some of the fans and people worried that somebody was interested in Kenny. Is that something you guys paid attention to or were aware of? Did it make you feel better when you saw the announcement Monday or Tuesday about the new contract?

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: Yeah, I mean, like he said, his name is thrown in those conversations a lot, and I think that speaks to him as a coach and his success on the field, obviously. We know how lucky we are to have him. When I hear those things like, oh, what if he leaves, what if he actually goes, I'm like, there's no way. I don't believe that until I see it.

I know that everyone around in the Stillwater community at OSU knows how lucky we are to have him. I think it's obvious in who he is as a man, his character, and as a coach. So I just kind of brush it off. Until it happens, like, I know he is here. I never really question whether he is going anywhere.

KELLY MAXWELL: Same thing Chelsea said. Just grateful that we get to play for him and that Stillwater has him here for a long time, hopefully. I'm just excited that he is here to stay and that contract extension.

Q. What did you guys do today to prepare as far as physical? Did you go somewhere? Just for Coach on this.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: We got up, went to breakfast, and then went right into big indoor and hit. Did a little defensive prep work. Pitchers turned their arms over. We just hit. We're ready. We don't need a whole lot now. We're at that point we practice really hard on Sunday night. On Monday at home feel like we got the celebration out of us and got us back on track. This team is ready.

They're dialed in. I wish we could play today.

Q. Kelly, you've been talked about at a lot of press conferences you haven't been at. Morgan the other day after they clinched the super regional talked about the difference in y'all's personalities and Coach has referenced it. You're so stoic out there. Are you churning inside? What's going on inside Kelly Maxwell when you are stoically striking people out?

KELLY MAXWELL: I just think inside I'm competitive. It doesn't differ from me or Morgan. I just think we both go out there and compete and give it our all. Just not one to show it. I've never really been like that ever since a young age.

It doesn't change what I'm doing in the circle and how I attack the hitters.

Q. For Chelsea and Sydney: You guys are veterans on this team. You fought the battles. You've fallen short the past two times. Just how have the expectations for the Women's College World Series kind of evolved for you two over the past couple of years, and what are you trying to do different this time?

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: Yeah, I feel like every year we just continue to have a better mentality of maybe the first year that we went to the World Series it was kind of like, oh, maybe we're a little lucky. I don't know.

Then we realized that we were really good, and then that next year we -- that was I think the COVID year, but we had it in our minds that we were going to get to the World Series.

Then last year we're, like, all right, we're going to get there. I think we were still maybe questionable about winning it, but this year we are for sure. I just think the biggest change is our mental state and how our mentality as a whole team has changed so much from just the first years that Chelsea and I have been here and this year.

I think every person on the team would say that, yeah, we can win this thing, and we're confident in that. We're just

really excited to end our careers on a good note and be here and just win this thing.

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: I'll take a step farther back. Freshman year I remember we lost in regionals, and I come to work at the World Series on their event staff. One of my first summers up here and other summers I've interned up here.

I was on their event staff, and I'm helping unload the buses and getting the gear off of the buses for the teams, and then we haul them to the field and help them just get their luggage everywhere or their equipment everywhere. I was, like, man, this sucks. This is not fun.

I loved working and being around the environment, but I'm carrying bags for the teams that I just played against, and I don't know if he remembers this, but I texted Coach G after that and I was, like, We're going to the World Series next year. That was kind of a big statement for a freshman or going to be sophomore for a program that hadn't been back -- or been to the World Series in a decade or however long it had been.

We went, and I think those first couple of years that we were here the goal we left it at getting here, and this year I think our goal is to win it -- I don't think, I know our goal is to win it, and that's our mentality that she talks about changing. We're not satisfying being here anymore because that's the standard that we've set.

So it's really cool to see the program set that standard, continue to reach it, and now we're taking that next step, and our goal isn't just to be here anymore.

So we're going to win a National Championship.

Q. For Kelly and Kenny: You spoke about the efficiency you have pitched with despite a pretty striking strike-out total. For you, Kelly, how have you gone about doing that? What do you credit that with? Kenny, what's impressed you there that she's been able to keep up that efficiency?

KELLY MAXWELL: I think just going after what I know and what I do best and that's just spinning the ball. It doesn't take velocity to win at this level. So just being able to effectively spin the ball with my rise and my off-speed, and then get those hitters' timings off. Just taking that and using my competitive nature.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I just marvel at the way her and John have worked. After last year her and John talked about adding a pitch or adding a different look, the way they tunnel and do some things. The off-speed, the change-up

has become deadly.

It's turned her into one of the best left-handers in the world, pure and simple. It's really cool when you can have as much success as she had last year, and she can walk in and go, yeah, I've got to keep getting better.

I know she'll take that same approach when this season is done, whenever it's done. Okay, what do we have to do to fight the video that's out there now? How do we fight that?

They'll take that same approach and keep what she's got good and keep adding on. That's just the value of John and the value of a kid right here that just has a thirst for getting better each day. It's really cool to watch.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for your time. We appreciate it.

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