

2022 Women's College World Series

Monday, June 6, 2022

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Oklahoma State Cowgirls
Coach Kenny Gajewski

Sydney Pennington

Chelsea Alexander

Kiley Naomi

Kelly Maxwell

Postgame Press Conference



Texas - 6, Oklahoma State - 5

THE MODERATOR: This is the Games 13 and 14 press conference featuring the Oklahoma State Cowgirls joined by head Coach Kenny Gajewski, and our student-athletes are Kelly Maxwell, Kiley Naomi, Chelsea Alexander, and Sydney Pennington. Questions for our student-athletes, please.

Q. Kelly and Sydney, if you could both just kind of talk about how things got away there late. You guys are up 5-0, and then find yourself in a hole. Just the emotions and the swings that you guys went through in that game.

KELLY MAXWELL: Well, I just think going into that I was a bit tired from previous games, but I knew I was just going to pour my heart into everything for these seniors.

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: Yeah, I'm not really thinking about the game too much right now. Just trying to make some more memories with my friends and just soak all this in one last time. I think we all can go back and see that we could have done things differently, but it is what it is.

I'm just glad that we keep setting the bar higher and higher each year for OSU.

Q. Kiley, the play -- well, I'll ask all four, actually. Just your emotions on the play where they scored three to push you ahead. It was crazy as it was unfolding to watch. To have to experience it either in the field or in the dugout, what was going through your minds then?

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: Yeah, like I said, it is what it is. We played pretty clean defense all season and just had a couple of mishaps there at the end. I'm just really proud of this team and what we've done in this World Series.

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: Ditto. There's not much that you can go back and fix this, fix that, but like she said, it is what it is. And you look back on our season and how well, like she said, we continued to set the bar higher. We let it get away from us and just couldn't push some more runs across.

Credit Texas. They took advantage when we didn't, and so, I mean, it is what it is.

KILEY NAOMI: Same. I think it was just important for us to keep our cool and just keep fighting with all of our hearts and trust in each other that at the end of the day it is what it is. Just keep fighting until the end.

KELLY MAXWELL: It happens. I just think going into the future we just have to learn from our mistakes and get better.

Q. Kelly, you kind of referenced it just a little bit ago. Could you talk about what the senior class has done for this team this season?

KELLY MAXWELL: There's no words. These girls I've looked up to ever since I came in. They're true Cowgirls.

Q. Hey, Chelsea. Can you talk us through the play you scaled the wall. It looked like it was very close, but how close were you, did you feel like, and was there an injury? Did you get cut, or what happened there?

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: I felt really close. That's one that I wish I could have back because if I make that play, it's a different ball game. So I was kicking myself a little bit there.

I mean, that ball got out there really quick, so I just reacted. I don't think I had my glove quite high enough. Just kind of tipped the ball at the top of my glove and just didn't make

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the catch.

It's a tough play, but I wish I could have made it for my team, but -- and then somehow my right arm caught the fence and just kind of scraped. I had a previous scab there, so it just ripped that off, so I just got bandaged up.

Yeah, I mean, it's part of it. Those are tough plays, and you can't always make them. I wish I could have that one back, though.

Q. I'll ask this to whoever feels capable of answering right now. Emotions you're feeling right now, what is it about this team and about this season that has you feeling how you are in this moment right here?

THE MODERATOR: Sydney, could you answer that, please?

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: I think it's all the adversity we faced all year. We just kept pushing through, and even if we had a few bad days, we bounced right back and just kept pushing.

This team was amazing, and I'm just really glad that we started peaking at the right time, and now we could finish it here and, for the seniors, end our careers here.

We're happy how the year turned out. Obviously, we're not super thrilled, but we're okay. To end our career here is amazing, and this team was amazing, and just all the ups and downs that we've had I'm really glad with how we pushed through.

THE MODERATOR: Chelsea, can you answer that as well, please?

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: She hit the nail on the head there. I think the adversity that we faced really brought us together as a team, and so to know that this team will never be together again is really tough.

For Sydney and I, it's not just this game this year that's come to an end, and so I think that that's a lot of the emotions that you see.

I don't know what I'm going to do now that I don't get to put on a jersey and wear this logo across my chest again. And so it's a really weird feeling, but it's also I kind of have a weird calm about me as well because we went and continued to set the bar higher every year, and so you can't be too upset with how it turned out. I think that's what she means. We just continued to get better every year and continued to raise that standard, and can't be mad about that.

Even though it's heartbreaking to see the season end.

THE MODERATOR: Kiley, please add something if you feel.

KILEY NAOMI: I just think it's really cool how we just live in the moment with our friends and our family and how these girls and these seniors set the bar for next year and the following years after that. We can't thank you guys enough for showing what a true Cowgirl is like. Thank you, guys.

Q. Kelly, from a big picture perspective, what was this year like for you personally? Third most strike-outs in program history, your first year as an ace. What was it like for you personally?

KELLY MAXWELL: I think it's just a good feeling. It's not where we wanted to finish and stuff like that, so I think just scratching this year, putting it behind, and looking forward to what's ahead.

Q. Sydney and then Chelsea. You both sort of addressed this, but wonder if you could expound on the program that you feel like you're leaving behind after putting so much into it the last five years each.

SYDNEY PENNINGTON: I'm just really glad that I chose OSU. I wouldn't have wanted to play for anybody else. Coach G always says that once you play and you're done, you're a Cowgirl for life.

And I'm just really excited to watch now, and like Kiley said, I'm really happy that me and Chelsea and our class got to set that high standard. And now we're looking forward to them to keep it going and then even win that World Series. We're excited for them too.

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: You look at the five years that we've been here, the growth that we've seen is just incredible. So to be a part of that and have that opportunity, I have no words for what that means to me.

I look back on my journey personally and what I've been through and what I've had overcome to get here, and I couldn't have dreamt this. To be in the World Series three times, to be in the starting line-up on those teams, it means a lot to me.

So to have those opportunities, I'm just really extremely grateful to see the growth of this program, and I just can't wait to watch it continue to grow. I think we've left it on a really good note, and people know what it's like to be here now. Just curious to see or excited to see them in the

future and see what they can accomplish.

Q. Chelsea, it may be too close to have an answer for this, but Texas was in here talking about how they didn't feel like they had anything to lose. Nobody expects them to be here. They had to win twice. They hadn't beaten you guys all year, blah, blah, blah. Do you feel like you guys were sitting sort of in that catbird seat? Was there pressure? I don't know if we're too close for it to know that, but did you sense that at all?

CHELSEA ALEXANDER: You know, I look back, and I think we came out a little bit flat that first game. I don't know if it was playing Texas or if we thought that we just kind of had -- I don't know what that is, what that cause, that reason was.

I think we showed a lot of fight in that second game and just had our backs up against the wall. We didn't have anything to lose either, and just let a few things get away from us.

It's part of the game there. I don't have a lot to say on what that -- the reason for that was.

THE MODERATOR: Kelly, Kiley, Chelsea, Sydney, thank you very much for your time. We appreciate it during the whole week, and congratulations. Questions for Coach, please.

Q. Kenny, every now and then I would sneak a peek at you as your players were speaking, trying to get a read on what must be running through your mind after experiencing a game like that and players like this. I don't know if you want to try to encapsulate it, but if you could give us your best shot on that.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah. It's tough. When you have kids that care like this, it's tough. So I would honestly rather be in this moment than not, you know what I mean? I hate feeling this. I hate feeling like this for them.

I'm just really -- like I told them, I'm just so grateful for what these seniors have done for us, the way they've continued to raise the bar. It's going to hurt. It's going to hurt for a long time, and it should hurt. That's why you play. Only one team is going to hoist the trophy at the very end, so it's going to hurt for everyone at some point besides the winning team.

But it's a good hurt because when you are around a lot of people who really care about each other and just trying to achieve a goal, those type of things hurt when you just fall short. Like I told them, when they're my age, they'll look

back and go, Pretty good stuff. But right now, a lot of tears. A lot of tears.

Q. For you guys all season you've been so good defensively.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah.

Q. To have things unravel in that aspect of the game, does that make this even more painful? What's your --

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I'm not sure, but I think this may be the first game that we've had more than one error in a game. I don't know if Jordan is in here it, if that's true or not, but I thought we were kind of going down that path.

To make three errors was tougher to watch and tough to take. We were trying to win, says and that's the bottom line. We just didn't make the plays when it counted. We weren't very clean. We didn't pitch clean. We didn't play defense clean. We didn't have enough good at-bats.

We can look back at that one play because it had so much implication, but it didn't cost us the game. We just didn't score enough runs, and we just weren't clean enough all the way around. We weren't clean enough from the first game. There was a lot of weird plays in that first game that we didn't make that don't show up as errors, but little tiny plays that save bases, save 60 feets, and we just weren't good enough.

Q. You've talked at the very start of the season about how this is probably your most talented team that you've ever had. I know the season has only been over for 30 minutes, but can you kind of put your finger on maybe how this team will be remembered?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Well, in our time here all the -- it's a top three, fifth finish in the country. It's pretty dang good.

We won a Big 12 Championship, tournament championship. Hasn't been done here. We just kind of keep continuing to raise the bar.

This team will go down as a team that got us to the next step, and there's some really good people here that will go down as all-time greats here.

Chelsea, I mean, I tried to tell her to don't come here because I just didn't think she would play. That kid just kept coming at me. I'm coming here. There's just no measurement of the heart. It's cool.

And Syd, I go way back with her dad. To see everything that she's gone through here. Her first year was tough

here. She had a kid that she was fighting in the infield that didn't treat her very good, and it was really good coaching moment for me as well. We put her in left. We put her at third. We even tried to catch her at one point and do some things. She was just, like, yeah, whatever you want.

With these type of kids, it's just -- you're going to miss those guys, Richbourg, what she did here. Big, big home run against Florida State in '19 that put us ahead in extras.

You just kind of keep going down the list. It's really cool. Then start talking about the transfers and these kids that came in here and embraced this place, and made it enough for everything. It's really cool.

Q. It may be a little too fresh, but you've called this season the hardest year you've had here at times, but obviously some sweetness in it too. What did this team teach you about this job, about what your role is here and what you're doing with this program?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I think what it does is it reminds you how lucky we are to do what we do. It has been hard. It's been really hard. The expectations that I put on them, probably I'm pretty out there. When I think where we're -- we're good, I'm going to let you know we're pretty dang good; and if we're not, I'll let you know the same thing.

I look back on that and go, man, maybe I put too much on them at times. I don't think that now, but in the middle of our year when we were going through stuff. Just kind of learning as a head coach.

I'll be better. I think I really feel like -- one of you asked this. I think I let them down in the first game. I think my energy was kind of flat, to be honest.

I don't know why. I didn't have nerves. I was just kind of flat. I could feel it. I was trying to get myself going and trying to get them going. We were flat in the first game.

For whatever reason, I can chew on that all summer long and try to figure out how to be better. That's part of this. Nothing good in life is easy. I think we'll look back in a couple of days and feel pretty good about what's gone on.

Hurts right now, but I think here shortly we'll start to go back and just remember all the ups and downs and learn and figure out how to take the next step to get to where they want to get.

Q. Going into the year you were high on Kelly, but with it being over now, did she surprise you at all? Did her level of dominance surprise you at all?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: No. It didn't. She's been really good. She was really good last year, and I think we did a really nice job of kind of easing her into those moments, and she just kept doing her thing.

So we knew we had to get her a little stronger, a little more endurance. We still know that now. We've got to get her -- everyone is tired right now, but it just takes a lot. This is a grind out here. This thing, this season, is a grind, but it's the best grind.

I'm just not surprised by what she's done, and I could tell when I was talking to our team and I told them, these type of moments are what should drive you this summer, next fall. These are the moments that you look back to and go, I don't want to feel like that again.

And I saw her shaking her head and kind of nodding. I was, like, she hears me, she gets it. It's really cool. We're lucky to have her here.

Q. You guys obviously host regionals and supers. Roll through there. Higher seed. Win your first two games. Opportunities you seem to take advantage of. Was it -- I don't know if surprising is the right word, but to get to today and have that chance, can you kind of grasp how that didn't -- things had worked out so well. You guys had really embraced that and tackled that, and then today it was that was not the way it worked out.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah, in the first game I just kept thinking, we can't get anything to go our way. We can't make the little play that we have a girl in a rundown, and we botched that. Then we have a girl -- like, Syd made a play at third where she stopped a ball, a nice play, and we had the girl halfway to third that we didn't make that play.

Just a lot of little things that weren't going our way, and then we come out in that second game, and we get a 5-0 lead with Kelly. I'm, like, feeling pretty good, not going to lie. Who wouldn't be?

I didn't for once think the game was over, but I was feeling good. Like we scored five runs. We have Kelly Maxwell. We have a good defense. Then it just kind of -- I don't know if we let down or our girls did. I don't know.

It's probably too soon to be able to tell. I'll talk to them. These are questions I'll ask them. I'm in search of getting better, and these kids are pretty honest if you are honest with them and tell them why you want to know.

I think they'll let us know as we get going. So it hurts. I mean, to have it right there. You could feel it. So thankful

for these fans that showed out here. There's more and more orange every year that we come here. It's really cool the way this game is growing for our fans, the people of OSU. It's really neat.

I feel blessed have this opportunity, and I can't wait to start recruiting next week and building our next year's team.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much for your time. We appreciate it throughout the week.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Thank you.

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