

2022 Women's College World Series

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Texas Longhorns

Coach Mike White

Hailey Dolcini

Mary Iakopo

Jenae Jefferson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: This is the championship series press conference featuring the Texas Longhorns. We're joined by head coach Mike White and student-athletes Jenae Jefferson and Mary Iakopo and Hailey Dolcini. Open forum, so questions for anybody. Please start us off.

Q. Coach, do you believe in the concept of playing with house money?

MIKE WHITE: When I go to Vegas, I'm a donator, not a gambler. (Laughing) if you do happen to get something up, then you use it. You might as well spend it and try to get more.

We've been playing really free, and I think that's the concept we're playing with it is that we're not supposed to be here. We play best when we're relaxed and we're carefree, and that's what we've been doing.

Q. As a follow-up to that, looking back when the draw was announced, as bad as Texas would want to host a regional, do you think that it ultimately played into your benefit that you weren't a 15 or 16 seed, that you did have to go to Washington as opposed to drawing the number one, number two in a super?

MIKE WHITE: I've always wanted a crystal ball, but it's so hard to say what would have happened or what could have happened. All I know is that we got what we got, and in some respects, as I told the team, we kind of -- if we wanted a better seed, we had to play better during the season to make sure we don't get those types of seeds.

So we didn't hold a grudge against anybody for what happened. We just wanted to take the most of the

opportunity to go out and play in two great stadiums with great history. Especially the Arkansas series, which I didn't know much about the history between Arkansas and Texas back in the day, but we heard a lot about it on the lead-up to it.

That was what we built off was the excitement of getting out there and being able to play in those stadiums against rivalries like that. Obviously, a rivalry for me was from the Pac-12 when I was at Oregon with Washington, and I know they're very tough up there.

It was not an easy draw at all, and we didn't look at it that way for sure, but it was just like, hey, we're in the postseason. We have a shot. We're dangerous.

Q. Jenae, I was just wondering if you could shed some light on just what's made this team special to avoid elimination six different times in this tournament.

JANAE JEFFERSON: Honestly, I think what Coach said, just going out there and playing with a chip on our shoulder and knowing that no one really expected us to be here or thought we deserved to be here.

Even us not hosting a regional, I honestly think it played out in our favor. So just going out there each game and giving it our all and having fun at the end of the day because we wouldn't be in this position if we didn't give it our all out there.

Q. Coach, we talked to Jocelyn Alo a little earlier. She told a story about being offered at Oregon by you and then not getting -- or getting the offer kind of taken back. What do you remember about that? She did mention she was very young at the time. She said she was only 13.

MIKE WHITE: She would have to bring that up.

(Laughter.)

Probably the worst day of my coaching career probably. At the time what happened was we were looking for a catcher, and Jocelyn wasn't catching at that time. She had

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been moved from that position.

So she came in and decommitted from California, and I said, you know, I want to commit to you. I said, Well, we've kind of changed our priorities and what we want to do. Bad move.

Everything happens for a reason, and Jocelyn found the place that was best for her. Obviously, the rest is history, and she's just been a tremendous ballplayer. She's great for the sport, and I'm sure she's going to have a great career going forward.

Q. This is for Coach White. Just wanted to ask, the format was a big conversation last year. People wanted see some changes. Changes were made. You made the format work for you. Just your thoughts on how the format played out and your thoughts on having to play that double-header yesterday?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, as I told before that big momentum game is the second game. Winning that first game for us yesterday was huge, but not having the ability to come back and regroup can hurt some teams.

You play all year for it. So maybe eliminating double-headers altogether would be a good thing, but we've got to step forward right now. I think it's been a good step. Especially giving the winning teams one day off in between certainly helps.

We're looking to -- as I'm sure as a collective we're always looking to better the way it's done, but I think you can see -- I don't know what the TV ratings have been like, but I know they're good. That's what it's about is continuing to increase the exposure to the sport.

I don't know whether it hurt some of the crowds yesterday. I don't know what the crowd numbers were like. Maybe having those Monday series as opposed to Sunday. Those are things you have to look at. Certainly for Oklahoma State game, it was big. There's a lot of people in the stands. It didn't seem to hurt from that perspective.

Q. For Hailey and Mary, you guys both are from California, so I don't know how big and important the Red River Rivalry was out there, but can you kind of talk about that. And now that you've played in a couple of those games, what that environment is like and now to have it on such a big stage.

THE MODERATOR: Start with Mary, please.

MARY IAKOPO: Yeah. The Red River Rivalry didn't mean anything to me when I came here. Still doesn't because

you never like to look at the opponent. We like to just play carefree and play for each other.

I've actually played with most of those girls, so it's like playing the California teams all over again. So it's pretty fun to see them, just in a different uniform.

THE MODERATOR: Hailey.

HAILEY DOLCINI: Same thing. I've learned a lot about different rivalries and whatnot and everybody hating Texas since I've been here that I didn't know about.

I think when it goes to the rivalry, Coach White said it best before we played them in a three-game series: You can't call it a rivalry if you don't beat them.

I think at this softball program we hadn't beat them in years, and finally getting that one win, okay, you can kind of start to call it that again and keep competing with them. Yeah, for us I think just playing.

Q. This one is for Coach and Mary. Against Oklahoma State, you were able to kind of turn around the regular season results, get the wins when it mattered most. You obviously have a win against Oklahoma in the bag already, but what do you need to do, what is that X factor for you guys to do that again to win two here in the Champ Series?

MIKE WHITE: Mary, you want to go first?

MARY IAKOPO: I think we just need to win every pitch. That's been our motto going into each game is win every pitch.

We focus on every pitch, every inning, every out, and minimizing the damage. If we can win in the small aspects, I think overall there's less damage done.

THE MODERATOR: Coach.

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, it's (indiscernible) not playing the name on the jersey all year, and just setting a standard of softball. Obviously, our highest standard at one time of the win against Oklahoma. Everything came together, and we started to believe, and we started to play well.

Of course, it's hard to repeat that all the time, but we know that's the standard we can get to. We really started coming out with let's do ordinary better and let the extraordinary happen. I think at times we try to think too much and do too much instead of just doing the basics.

As I said last night, we've lost more games than I think --



than other opponents have won against us, so to speak. We've shot ourselves in the foot a lot of times. We had multiple errors. Our team has played unbelievable defense in this postseason, and that's what we go do. We're doing ordinary very well.

Q. Coach, I know -- in the Big 12 Tournament, I know everything on social media that went everywhere, but the fact remains on the field your team has been very different since that Big 12 Tournament. What was the switch that flipped at that point that has carried you through the rest of the postseason?

MIKE WHITE: Sure. I think it's just playing with, like we said, house money. Playing carefree. Not careless, just making the most of the opportunities and look around and enjoy it.

I told the ladies before we came here, this is going to be the best week of your life, and I didn't know -- I actually kind of lied because now it's become two weeks. Taking time to smell the roses and look around. You'll see me look around at the crowd and look at the stadium and just grateful to be here.

That's what you look at. Win or lose, it's just a moment in time for you in your life, and if you don't take time to smell it and enjoy it, then it passes you by.

Q. This question is for Coach White. Hope Trautwein, I wanted to ask you about her. Obviously, you have seen her the last few years down at North Texas. She's from the Austin area. Did you take a look at her when she entered the portal? What stood out to you about her then, and what is different about her now this last year at OU?

MIKE WHITE: Well, Hope Trautwein was a tremendous presence for North Texas when she played against them. We had pretty good success against her, but it was always tough. We knew she had a great rise-ball and threw very hard. She was our number one priority right down to the last minute.

Unfortunately, for us, that she decided to go to Oklahoma. We actually thought we had a really good shot at that one, and she was on campus and visited with us. I think she liked it, and she was a Texas kid, and we didn't want to lose her, but it is what it is right now.

But she's tough because she's gritty. She keeps throwing. She challenges you. She knows she has good stuff, and that's what makes her good.

Q. Two different questions. One first one for Mary and

Janae. I haven't heard you guys talk much about this, but can you all now say just how pissed off you were that you didn't get shirts after the Arkansas regional, and how that slight -- it seems to have lit a huge fire.

THE MODERATOR: Let's start with Janae, please.

JANA E JEFFERSON: I think we were pretty upset about it. Just having the overall experience for super regionals I feel like once you get out of your super regional, you look forward to the hats and the shirts, just take in the whole moment. Without having that, it was kind of like, oh, Texas is going, but we didn't really feel it as a team. I don't know. Didn't get that feeling of excitement really.

THE MODERATOR: Mary.

MARY IAKOPO: I definitely think we smelled a hint of disrespect, and we used that as fuel to fire us through the rest of this postseason.

So we're grateful to be here. We're grateful for the experience that we keep getting to have, so it is what it is, and we're just going to use it.

Q. You talked about your defenses a couple of times this week. From a coaching perspective, how do you divvy up the defensive responsibilities and practice? Who does what? Can you walk me through that?

MIKE WHITE: Coach Singleton works with the infield, and then Coach Bartlett works with the outfield. We do independent drills on that and then we come together as a group and work as a team. Do a lot of situation plays, prepare for the opponent we're going to play.

Q. Hailey, I wanted to go back to the series back home. What was different Thursday than Saturday? Saturday, obviously, was a huge emotional day. Cat's retirement jersey, all that stuff. Your pitching-wise, what was different those two days?

HAILEY DOLCINI: I don't think we really changed anything approach-wise from the first -- right out the gate that first game we were just -- the plan was to attack. They're a line-up one through nine of talented power hitters, and you can't fear them, but you have to respect them.

You have to trust that your stuff will beat their best swing, and only gave up three runs that first day, and that was a confidence boost and a small win for us. Going out there that last someday it was the same thing. Leave it all out there, one pitch at a time, and ultimately, everything worked out in our favor that day.

Q. Got a question for Coach and the players. For Coach, just can you talk a little bit about what you have seen in terms of Patty Gasso creating this program at Oklahoma and what she's built it to. And then for the players: You are going to be -- they're going to almost have a home field advantage. How do you take the crowd out of the game? How important is that during these next couple of days?

THE MODERATOR: Start with Coach White, please.

MIKE WHITE: I think as a coach what you want to do is try to create a machine, so to speak, where you just replace bits and pieces at a time. As one graduates, you bring the next piece in. Then you have your upper classmen that know your system, and they can teach the system. The coach only gets so much time with them.

That's kind of what we developed at Oregon a little bit, and now we're starting to develop that at Texas. Coach Gasso has done a phenomenal job there with the ability to create a program or a system that is working for them, and it's evolving each time. That's what you do as a coach.

You never think you have a system down. You are always looking to add to it and get it better because if you don't, you are going to get passed by.

As we know, it's kind of like the stock market. It's a little bit of up and downs, so you make sure to keep that thing flat and going upwards.

THE MODERATOR: Hailey.

HAILEY DOLCINI: Sorry. What was the question?

Q. (Off microphone)?

HAILEY DOLCINI: For us we just tell ourselves they're cheering for us. It's what you have to do sometimes.

I think we're just enjoying the experience, and the fact that regardless of who they're cheering for, there is upwards of 13,000 people here. It's an amazing experience as an athlete, but it's also incredible to see how far the sport has come. I think we're just enjoying every moment regardless of what they're yelling.

THE MODERATOR: Mary.

MARY IAKOPO: We've been on the road the last three weeks. Four now. So those stadiums, they were hard to play in, everyone yelling different things at you.

I think we are experienced in the level of not being at

home. So having those first three weeks under our belt is a confidence-booster for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Janae, if you have anything to add?

JANAE JEFFERSON: Just going off of both of them, I feel like we were very prepared just from the Fayetteville regional. I feel like that was a lot of people out there. And them yelling "let's go hogs," we were saying "let's go horns" in our heads. Just copy off Hailey and thinking they're cheering for us. We'll take that mentality into this game as well.

Q. I know tons of great players in the game right now. Tons of really good teams. Jocelyn Alo seems to have taken that sort of popularity to a different level. I know you're going to try to get her out the next couple of days, but on a bigger picture scale, what does it mean to have a player in the game that has that transcending ability like she has right now?

MIKE WHITE: I'm sure the state of Hawaii is enamored with her, and she would probably run for mayor when she gets done or for office.

This thing is bigger than the game, and she's starting to do that. All-time home run leader and is a great personality for the game. I hope that continues going forward no matter what happens this week.

She's going to have another career outside of college. It will be exciting to see how she does. I think USA Softball needs to look at her, somebody with that kind of talent. And I hope she just keeps pushing the limit and being a great ambassador for the sport.

Q. For the student-athletes for all three of you, you all have a unique perspective of playing for Coach White from your background. Can you describe what it's been like to play for Coach White?

THE MODERATOR: Start with Janae, please.

JANAE JEFFERSON: I think it's been amazing. Since my freshman year, I was with Coach Clark originally, so just coming in with this new coach here and just getting the idea of being a competitor and actually going out there and winning.

My freshman year we were just going out there to have fun, but now with him I feel that it's all about competing and going out there and giving it your all. He has pushed me to my limits, and I'm just extremely grateful for him.

THE MODERATOR: Mary.



MARY IAKOPO: I've known Coach White since I was 13. What, am I 22 now? Nine years.

Just having that relationship evolve and see the different coach he was at Oregon and how he was able to push such a good culture there and help build one here. It's been pretty amazing to see the different coach he has become throughout those years.

THE MODERATOR: Hailey.

HAILEY DOLCINI: For me I've only been here for six months and got to work with him, but that was part of the reason I chose Texas was to learn from him and all the experience he had at the Women's College World Series and as a pitcher himself. And just a lot of the experience he has had he uses for great lessons for us pitchers and us athletes. I think that that's been the best part.

Q. Mary, kind of following up on that same theme with Mike. You have been around him so long. You were talking about watching him evolve, and there's been that phrase going around recently on TV and elsewhere: "Chill" Mike White. Have you seen a difference in the way he is communicating or connecting with this group?

MARY IAKOPO: Yes. His communication is so different. It's evolved in the best way possible. My old teammates, we have a group chat going on and how he was more -- he pushed you in the right way, and he was hard on you, but his form of communication these days is more soft-spoken.

I think it works best for this generation going forward, and I think that's really great for our sport in order to form the best forms of communication and relationships.

Q. This is for Janae and Mary. You both were drafted professionally by leagues that didn't even exist three years ago. You look at NIL money coming in. How important are those things in the development of the game and the steps that were taken right now?

THE MODERATOR: Start with Janae.

JANAE JEFFERSON: I think it's really important for our sport overall, and it just shows how much this sport is growing, and I'm just extremely grateful for the opportunity to be in the sport at this moment and just have the opportunities that I do have. It's all because those that can come before me and just experiencing this moment here.

THE MODERATOR: Mary.

MARY IAKOPO: I think right now I'm just grateful that we even have this opportunity and for those that came before us and those that are still doing it that we can learn from. It's just a really cool thing for our sport, and I can't wait to see what it looks like in ten years from now.

Q. For Mary and Janae. I don't know how much you guys know Logan Eggleston, Rori Harmon, Peyton Stearns, all the great female athletes at Texas. Just the spring semester that the school has had, what feeling do you get when you know, hey, you're it's your turn, it's your turn to keep doing what everybody else has been doing and winning big?

THE MODERATOR: Start with Mary, please.

MARY IAKOPO: I think it's huge for Longhorn Nation. We definitely supported all those girls and their championship series, and we loved watching them, and we are good enough friends. So to know we have their support is pretty awesome.

JANAE JEFFERSON: I'm just glad it's our turn, and just to go out there and show people that we're just as good as them. All of our sports at Texas where we're phenomenal, and we show that Texas fight no matter what, and just going out there and, like Mary said, knowing that we have their support and we support them as well. We're all a big family at Longhorn Nation.

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

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