

2024 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, May 29, 2024
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Texas Longhorns
Coach Mike White
Reese Atwood
Teagan Kavan
Viviana Martinez

Press Conference



Of course, it's all about the experience for the student-athlete. We're open, too. We say we give them real-time feedback on their playing future, whether they're going to see some playing time or not see playing time, where they're ranked. It's up to them to make the decision.

We want to be on their side and help them, too. If it's not for them, we'll help them find a place to play. That's happened in our program, too.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Texas.

Coach, if you'd like to start with an opening statement.

MIKE WHITE: Well, we're excited to be here in Oklahoma City for the second time in the last three years. Thank you to USA Softball, Oklahoma City itself for putting this event on. It's a great stadium. We're excited to be here in front of this crowd. Ready to see some good softball.

It was fun watching all the teams playing over the last couple weeks. Some exciting stuff going on, including our games. I think it's great for the game itself. Hopefully a lot of people watching and we can provide some great entertainment for those that are watching throughout the country.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Mike, everybody nowadays has transfers. You have so many of your players that have been developed from high school players on up. Talk about how you did that, how you were able to keep such a large group of your high schoolers together through the program, what that's meant.

MIKE WHITE: That's a good question. It's a better question for the players themselves because they're the ones that make those choices to stay or go.

But we've really got a heavy emphasis on recruiting and bringing in young players, showing them that we can help them become better players, better people, provide a great education at the University of Texas for future years.

Q. For the players, any of you who wish to answer this. No matter who you play, the crowd is going to be against you. You're in Oklahoma. Either going to be Oklahoma fans that don't like you or Oklahoma State fans that don't like you. How do you approach that from a mental standpoint knowing you're basically going to be playing road games every day?

REESE ATWOOD: I think as a team we've learned to be able to take that energy and use it to benefit us. Like you said, a lot of people are going to be cheering against us, but we also have our family in the stands. We have each other, so that's all we really need.

VIVIANA MARTINEZ: I think we use that as motivation.

Q. Coach, it's been a couple months since you played Stanford. How much do you take away from the first two games? What do you hope the team takes away from those first games?

MIKE WHITE: The first game we were actually able to kind of get out to a good lead. Teagan threw extremely well against them. The second game was in Austin. NiJaree threw that game against us, threw well, exciting game, extra innings, 4-3, we lost. I expect nothing less in this next game.

They're a tough club. They're fired up. Jess is a great coach. NiJaree is obviously the best pitcher in the country right now, won the award last night. Congratulations to her and Stanford.

But we're going to be ready. That's what it is. That's what makes this thing great is that it's a new day, it's 0-0, so let's



go.

Q. You were obviously a part of conference realignment yourself. Having been at Oregon, I wanted your thoughts on the end of the Pac-12, which has for so long been the gold standard for softball?

MIKE WHITE: I think it's tough. But we're down the totem pole, so to speak, as a sport in relation to the breadwinners in men's football and basketball. Women's sports are catching up. We're hoping whatever the conference realignment does, it benefits softball in the long run. I don't know how it's going to shake out with the Olympic sports having to travel so much. I think that's going to be very difficult, especially three time zones for some of these clubs. We're just doing one, which is going to be bad enough as it is.

I don't know. This might be a question to ask in maybe two or three years once everything kind of shakes out. Who knows? We go with the flow. I mean, it's not our job to make those decisions. We'll do whatever it takes to play. We're excited about going to the SEC. Obviously 13 of those teams made the post-season, incredible conference. It's going to help softball itself.

I think week in and week out, we saw a tough ACC team last week, that was a knock-down, drag-out series. I think as I told my friends, every weekend is going to be like this coming into those environments.

Q. In the past Oklahoma has won the Big 12, usually been the No. 1 seed. This year you are the No. 1 seed. Any change in how you approach this week, your attitude coming in?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, well, unfortunately the three players to my right here haven't been at this before. They're a young talent, but they're the best we've got on our club right now. They're excited.

We try to tell them and help them. We've had eight players that have been here before in 2022. But it is exciting. Oklahoma obviously is the gold standard, as you said. We've played them a number of times. We're fortunate to come out on that series. It was a good series. Played in Austin.

The crowd here is tough. It's a tough place to play. We're ready to go. But maybe the ladies can jump in on this one.

REESE ATWOOD: I think coming here, it's definitely going to be something new for us young players, but we're definitely going to lean on the seniors and players that were here before us. They've been here, they know what

to do, how certain things play out. Just being able to learn from the experience and learn from them going into this week.

TEAGAN KAVAN: Planning on soaking it all up, learning a lot from talking to our veteran players, anyone who has been in the situation before, just figuring out a way we can do this together and as a team, combat any adversity.

VIVIANA MARTINEZ: I think we continue to compete and treat every game like it's a big one. It's going to be a good tournament so I'm excited.

Q. Reese, you've done so much so well this year. Your stardom has risen so much. How have you handled that through the course of the year to continue producing at the level you've proved?

REESE ATWOOD: Playing the game freely. I play with some of the greatest teammates. They're my family, my best friends. Being able to play on this team means so much to me. It's gotten me to where I am today, allowed me to improve my game learning from them. I'm super grateful to be a part of this team.

Q. Through the course of the year, the different experiences you've had, whether it's big wins, tough breaks, to get to the point you're at, what have your experiences through the course of your freshman year done to have you ready to play on this stage?

TEAGAN KAVAN: Yeah, I've been put in a lot of big situations. I think that's only going to help me going forward. I'm grateful I have the ball out there. Like Reese said, I have my team that always has my back and they always help me through it.

Q. Could you specify who are some of those leaders that have been really helpful for you this season, if there's any advice that you're planning to take with you?

VIVIANA MARTINEZ: For sure our captain, Alyssa Washington. She helps out a lot on the infield, gives us the feedback we need like if it's being soft to the pitcher on defense. Having everyone calm down and relax in those pressure situations. Just soaking everything in 'cause I know that a lot of the seniors now have told us that it's going to be a hundred times bigger than the Big 12 tournament. Soaking that in and also competing.

TEAGAN KAVAN: I think we have great leaders in all of our classes. Shows how well-rounded we are as a team. We can all help each other and step up in big moments.

Q. Coach, you're aware of the agreement with the NCAA and the conferences paving the way for schools to pay athletes directly. Do you have any concern at all about how that might affect softball down the road, whether money might be diverted in the sport to paying football players, or if you feel like the sport is at a point where it's enough of a priority for schools that it can benefit from this?

MIKE WHITE: I think that's going to be an issue for each individual school. All I can say is that from Texas' point of view, I have full faith that Chris Del Conte is going to make sure softball is taken care of, so to speak. I don't know what that is going to mean, where it's going to end up. That's yet to be seen.

We're all hoping that it doesn't hurt softball, that's for sure. We are in a growth stage, along with several other women's sports that have taken off right now.

We're certainly afraid of that, that's for sure. We don't want that to happen. We're hoping each individual school sees the benefit of keeping the money in softball and keeping it as a premier sport.

Q. How does a series as competitive as the one with Texas A&M prepare you guys for this tournament? How do you recover from it as well physically?

REESE ATWOOD: I think it was just such a learning experience coming in. I think that's exactly what we needed going into this week. It's definitely going to be hard. That series prepared us. It was a fight every single inning. There were a couple times where we were tested to the maximum limit. We were able to pull through with a win in the series. I think that's definitely prepared us for this week.

TEAGAN KAVAN: We talked about it all weekend, that that series was going to prepare us. I think it only makes us better. I'm glad we were battle-tested then and we can use that to help us going forward.

VIVIANA MARTINEZ: Being battle-tested has shown us lean against each other and trust each other whether we make mistakes or not. I think we fought through each inning. It showed us and everybody else that we have grit.

MIKE WHITE: By design we played a tough schedule this year, played in a tough conference. Three of our teams have made the College World Series. We've had to make big plays throughout the year. No difference last weekend. We had to make some big plays, big at-bats, good pitches. The ladies were able to do that. The adversity created going through the whole year, hats off to them because it's

not easy and we were able to come through on the right end of things.

Q. Coach, how much do you take into those two meetings that you played with Stanford earlier in the year? How much are you both different now?

MIKE WHITE: That's a good question.

That's why we're going to play. It's not played on paper at all. Whoever can handle the environment the best. There's always a test between how well you can play and how well you do play. It's the one that's able to handle it in the moment. That's kind of yet to be seen.

Obviously we're facing one of the best pitchers in the country. We know that. We have one of the best offensive teams in the country. What a matchup. I'm excited to see what happens.

Q. Reese, about hitting against NiJaree, looking at that game, how have you grown since then and how has your approach to the plate evolved?

REESE ATWOOD: NiJaree is such a great pitcher, first of all. She won that award last night for a reason. One of the best pitchers I've ever faced.

Going into this weekend, I'm going to make sure the team is on track to do what we do best, get on top of her rise ball, get a good pitch to hit. I think that's going to be key facing her.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for Texas.

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