

2024 Women's College World Series

Friday, May 31, 2024

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Oklahoma State Cowgirls
Coach Kenny Gajewski
Jilyen Poullard
Caroline Wang

Postgame Press Conference



Stanford 8, Oklahoma State 0

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Oklahoma State.

We'll start with an opening statement by coach.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Well, obviously it's not where we wanted to be tonight. We wanted to be the first team inside this room. That didn't happen.

Credit to Stanford. What Jess has done there has been really good. It's been an incredible turnaround for her in her short time there. She's really good. She's won everywhere she's been. Credit them. They made things happen here tonight against one of the best pitchers in the country.

I didn't think Lexi was particularly sharp, but they still took advantage of that. That's what good teams do. That's why they'll advance.

I'm just really proud of this group. I mean, I'm just really proud. Especially kids like these two here that have come in here for one year and just totally, totally took to the Cowgirl way, took to Stillwater, to Oklahoma State. It's probably the most satisfaction that I could have personally.

They played their last game here, but I know that these guys will be a staple here for a long time. They'll be talked about for a long time. They earned that. That's the best part of this.

I'm excited for their futures, all the seniors. Got a senior manager that won't be back. I'm just excited for all them because I think they're more ready than when they got here to take the next step in life.

In the very end, that's what we're here to do, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. As you reflect on this year, you make it to the World Series, what does that look like?

CAROLINE WANG: I never thought I'd be in the place to say I wasn't ready to be done, but I think when you play for this type of program, you can never be ready.

JILYEN POUILLARD: I agree. When I left the place I was at, I was ready to hang up my cleats. I was perfectly fine with never playing the game of softball again.

I prayed on it. I just knew, I mean, after all the hard work that I put into this game, I deserve to end my career in my own way, in the way that I would be proud of.

Ever since I've been here, the end has just been so dreaded. At some point it was going to come. Unfortunately that was tonight.

But I couldn't be more blessed to be a part of this team, team nine. I couldn't be more blessed. It's been such a blessing. Everything about every single one of these girls, Coach G. Forever have my back all my life. I'll never forget it.

Q. What's it like to hear your coach say y'all were only here for one year but what you did is going to outlive you? It's going to feel like you were here for a lot longer.

CAROLINE WANG: I mean, it's great to hear that. That's what everybody wants.

But Coach G is very clear and open about it. It's something that we've talked about for a long time. Like, there's nothing that could be said here tonight that he hasn't already told us and, like, lived out for us.

JILYEN POUILLARD: One thing Coach G told me yesterday is, It's already written. Like, there's nothing more that you can do. There's nothing less that you can do.



You're already prepared.

Although I didn't have a hit in this tournament, I didn't get on base this tournament, that was something that really stuck with me. I'll never forget that. I plan to go on and coach. That's something that I'm definitely going to use.

But, I mean, obviously when you go out kind of like tonight, all that's on your immediate conscious is what could we have done better. The list kind of goes on there.

Just to know and just that it's still reiterated, the value that we provided to this team, to this program, coming from the man himself saying that it will never be forgotten, it's huge. It kind of lifts you up for a bit.

Q. What has Lexi meant to this team this year?

CAROLINE WANG: I mean, Lexi is a leader like I haven't seen before. I'm not sure that anyone watching the games from the outside could see it either, the person that she is to this team.

Honestly, just a rock. She's steady. Even on her worst days, she's that. Everyone looks to her. That's something I've admired about her from the start. There's really talented people, but Lexi obviously is that, but she obviously has the best interest of the team in mind.

If it's not her pitching, then it's not. She's the best teammate when she's not pitching, the same she is when she's on the field.

JILYEN POUILLARD: I agree with what Caroline said about Lexi being a rock. I also have never seen someone who can lead with such poise, in a sense just so effortlessly. Always a player that is super passionate about anything, is kind of loud, animated a bit. That's always been my method of leadership in a sense, just kind of trying to spark something for my teammates.

Her calmness, you can see it as being stoic or even sometimes, like, does she even care. But she cares the absolute most, and there's no doubt about that. You can ask any girl on this team, Lexi's heart is always there, always in it, although she doesn't show a whole lot of emotion. She is the rock of this team. Well, was...

That's something I'll always admire about her. She's always steady. If she does speak up, it's time to get it together. That's something that will always hold a lot of weight. I agree, I just love the presence that she has and the way she can use that in her leadership. It's awesome.

Q. Jilyen, you said you're going to go into coaching.

Kenny, the impact he had on you? Was that something you already planned on doing before coming to Oklahoma State?

JILYEN POUILLARD: A bit of both. I've always just had a lot of love for the game, a lot of passion. Playing under someone who kind of took that away from me kind of lit my fire even more to put the love back into kids, put the love back into the game for them.

Coming here, Coach G has really showed me how to do that. I kind of had my own ideas of how I kind of wanted to do that, methods, things like that, but I never actually saw it done, especially not in the last four years.

The way that Coach G loves us, not only when we do well, not only when we're on the field, but he loves each and every one of us as people. I think that shows. That's the Cowgirl way. It's not just when someone is doing good that you're excited for them, that you're loving them. He loves us so much.

That's something that I've always admired about him. So kind of both, a bit of both.

THE MODERATOR: That will do it for players. Thank you. We'll continue with questions for coach.

Q. The emotion from Caroline and Jil, what does that mean to you?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah, I mean, it's why you coach. I mean, it's why you hope to have an impact on these guys.

We say a lot of things, but we work really hard to follow through and be intentful with the things that we do and we talk about.

I mean, it's nice. I wish we weren't having this talk right now, to be honest. That's the hardest part, is that I wasn't ready to have it at this point.

Feels good, but doesn't make the loss feel any better at this point.

Q. For Lexi, after the game was over, you kind of had a moment with her. What was that like?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah, if any of you have ever been an ace, then you can have perspective of her. If you haven't, you have zero idea what that's like. The things she shoulders here, the things that her parents shoulder here. When the ball is in your kid's hands every pitch, it's tough.

I probably have never seen her be as emotional as I saw her tonight. I could see it early on when she gave up the home run. I saw a look on her face. I was like, I don't like it. I was worried. I just was worried for her.

I think it's just you feel things slipping away, even though it was early in the game. After last night, I knew it was going to be a tough one to come back from.

I just gave her a hug. I kind of got on her a bit 'cause she kind of disappeared for a bit. I said, Hey, your teammates need you out here. You know what I mean? They need you. You've earned that. You've earned everything that you get. I need you out here. Your teammates need you out here.

I wanted to reinforce to her how important she is to us. I talk to a lot of kids. They always tell me, I want to be the ace, until it gets hard. She never ran from hard. She just embraced hard.

I just wanted to remind her that we appreciate that and it's not over yesterday. You have to keep embracing the hard.

Q. Did you feel the snake bit her in the third, were they in the right spot for them, wrong spot for you that led to a couple runs?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I do. Just a little bit of bad luck, a little bit of Stanford just doing what they needed to do. It's the way our game works. This field is, like, really hard. You see a lot of balls that chop in the air high. They had a hit that kind of bounced over us, a couple that found their way through. There's so many deflections.

It's the way it's played. I mean, that's why you play this game. I don't want to take anything away from Stanford. They earned this thing. They earned the win. But there was a lot of little things that just didn't go our way.

It's tough. I just feel like it's happened to us multiple times here. We just got to find a way. It's my job to help find a way. I felt a little bit helpless here tonight, to be very honest. No matter what I tried or did, just didn't work.

So just part of it. It's the way this game works.

Q. Offensively two good pitchers, back-to-back nights, or something you guys couldn't get any hits?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah, I think a little bit of both. I thought that Rothrock last night was really good. Deceptively good.

Tonight, I thought we had a pretty good offensive

performance. We didn't score any runs. We had three hits. The hardest balls we hit were caught. We hit multiple balls hard.

Tallen Edwards has no hits, had three balls that were hit well. Jilyen had the last one that scorched. We had multiple opportunities. We just couldn't make little things happen.

That's on me. I just didn't have answers. I didn't have enough to help Vanessa. I'll be very honest. This is why I made a change in December with our hitting spot. I felt like we needed to make a change. There's something that was just not quite there. It wasn't an easy move. We made that move.

I have the right person in the spot. I just put her in a terrible place. I didn't give her any opportunity in the fall to install, instill, install the system, instill the toughness that it takes to win here. She has that. I just put her in a tough spot.

That's what I told her tonight. I said, Hey, I put you in a really bad spot, and you killed it. We just ran out of gas.

We got a lot of young kids. We have a nucleus of kids. We have a couple freshmen coming in. We're already busy in the portal to help us out. She'll get a full year now under her belt, half a year, a great season. We get to OKC, now she can build off this, go back to square one, she'll get us through this. That's why I brought her here.

Q. To hear Caroline and Jil talk about when they got here, in one's case kind of already being ready to be done, in another just happy she had one more year, how they started to dread how this day would come, what is that like to watch players show up with that kind of attitude towards softball and then to watch them rediscover what it's like to be a kid and dread this day?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I mean, it's really cool. I think what's happening is we're starting to show that Oklahoma State is a destination place. It's a destination job. It's a destination four years. It's been a hard road for us to attract young, five-star-type, however you want to rate this stuff, because we don't have the glitz and the glamour that some things have.

What you're seeing is mature kids, who I would think they would probably say I wish I would have started here. I think we're starting to turn that tide. We're starting to change the story about what we have that's so special.

It's still about people. It's not about anything else. It's



about people. What our administration has let me do is create and build a staff of great people that these kids can start to trust again and start to just get back to that eight-year-old self that loves this game.

We talk about it a lot. We talk about this is not who you are, it's what you do. You're good enough to play here, but we wanted you because we felt like you could help us and we could help you.

That won't change. It feels good because I think we're on the right road. Like I told them, this is supposed to hurt. It's supposed to hurt. Anything good in life probably had some hurt.

They're going to be able to look back at this in about a day, because life just keeps going. It doesn't just stop. It just keeps going - as long as you wake up. It keeps going.

I feel like we have a place that they can grow and create these moments and these memories that are going to last a lifetime. It's a forever thing. I think they're falling in love with that.

The more kids we have like this, they're able to tell this story, because we're able to get here and we have this opportunity to sit in front of all of you, you guys write these great things about them, I think it's what makes us all proud.

I'm just glad that I get to be a part of it, a small part of it. I'm glad that I have a staff that has my back every single day. It gives me the opportunity to be the best me, the most authentic me. It's not always perfect, but it's real.

I think that's what these kids love with all of us. We're going to give them our best, not shy away from the truth. We're going to tell them the truth even when it hurts.

So it feels good.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up.

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