

2024 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, June 5, 2024
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Oklahoma Sooners
Coach Patty Gasso
Tiare Jennings
Kinzie Hansen
Kelly Maxwell

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma 8, Texas 3

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Oklahoma. We will take an opening statement from coach.

PATTY GASSO: Yeah, just a very good, well-played game by the Sooners. Everything was working, offense. I love how we scored right out of the gate. Kelly was masterful all game. Defense, Avery Hodge made some really good plays. It was just a really well-played game. We capitalized on mistakes.

You see us here, and we're not over-jubilant because we know there's still a lot of work to do against a very, very good team that has very good pitchers, very good hitters. I mean, we know what's in front of us still. So you don't see us celebrating. There's still a lot of work to do.

But proud of the approach that we had today, the energy, the effort, just the fact that we kind of punched first was important for us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Kinzie, Kelly has been really good all year. What has it been like to see these last three performances?

KINZIE HANSEN: I'm just super proud of her and just kind of Kelly has always been a phenomenal pitcher, but I feel like she's taken it to the next level just in her mental state of mind. She's given it up to the Lord, I know that.

The battery between a pitcher and a catcher is something that I love most about my job. Being able to watch her development, not only from the time I've been playing her,

but just in this year alone, our connection that we've built, just the friendship, has been pretty amazing.

It's been paying off. So I'm just super proud of her. She's been dominating. She's throwing through all quadrants of the zone at all different speeds. She's not letting her foot off the gas. I'm just super proud.

Q. Kinzie, can you describe what it's like when you get the bats rolling like you did early? Kelly, getting run support, describe what that's like.

KINZIE HANSEN: It's extremely contagious. We obviously didn't hit our best the last couple days, I would say, against Florida. Tiare came out, she threw the first punch of the game. She hit that bomb. We were super stoked for her.

We just kept passing the bat. We are constantly giving each other confidence and encouragement throughout every sim pitch, inning. That's what takes all the pressure off of us, is just the confidence in one another, being able to trust each other. Not one pitcher or one player is going to get the job done for us today, tomorrow or any moment going forward.

It's just been super fun. We've been working really, really hard these past few weeks before coming. We knew this moment was going to come. We've prepared for it, and it's definitely showing.

Q. Tiare, can you talk a little bit about your first inning at-bat setting the tone, also a little bit about Kinzie and Kasidi going back to back in the third inning.

TIARE JENNINGS: Yeah, super fun. I think this is my first at-bat, trying to get as much information as I can, trying to hit the ball hard. Got into a good count, was able to see a good pitch. Got a good swing off.

I think that kind of gave confidence for the team. I came in the dugout, got all the information I saw, passed it on, and good things happen when you swing hard. It definitely worked out in our favor.

Q. (No microphone.)

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TIARE JENNINGS: Super fun. Brought so much energy and life to the dugout. It got us so fired up. Again, all that passing information to each other, instilling confidence within one another, then good things happen.

It was really a cool moment. Kinzie has done it before, but for Kas, just to see her smile, and celebrating with her was really fun.

Q. Kelly, Kinzie referenced the mental load it is to throw this many innings the last few days. How are you feeling physically and mentally? Are you going to be ready tomorrow?

KELLY MAXWELL: I think just the mental side of it. This is it. This is my last opportunity. I'm just going to do everything I can to keep this team in it. I know that they have my back and I got theirs. That side of it.

Then physically, I'm doing good. The staff here is doing everything they can to keep me going and feeling good.

Q. Tiare and Kinzie, obviously you prepare for all their pitchers. Are there any benefits having faced Rothrock for 15 innings, then getting Kavan?

TIARE JENNINGS: Yeah, I'd say they're both really good pitchers. They throw similarly on the same plane. Definitely was good to see some pitches like that. Just kind of worked in our favor.

But the plan doesn't change. Still attacking, still going to get our swing off, swing at good strikes. Definitely helped us in a good way.

Q. Tiare, I think you have 11 World Series home runs now. Do you remember all of them? If so, where does this one rank? If not, do you remember this one?

TIARE JENNINGS: I would say that I remember all of them just because I see my family in the stands when they get the ball. Their joy, just so much, like, faith in me. I just love to see them out there with the ball. I don't know what they're going to do with them or what. I don't know where they are.

All of 'em are special. Just means the world to me to do anything I can to help this team. Having my family get the home run ball is something why I remember it.

Q. Kelly, Mia Scott hits a home run in the first. What was really the key to you settling in after that? How much different was it attacking this Texas lineup versus the challenge you faced yesterday with

Florida?

KELLY MAXWELL: Oh, geez. Sorry, can you repeat the first part of the question?

Q. The key to settling in after the first inning home run.

KELLY MAXWELL: Yeah, I knew that was a mistake on my behalf. I mean, if you make a mistake, this Texas lineup, they're good enough, they're going to send it out of the park.

Just being able to kind of flip the switch, know that, hey, good for her. Credit them. But knowing that I still have other options to throw.

Q. Then, Tiare, the way that she handled that, the way you've seen Kelly handle things.

TIARE JENNINGS: Yeah, no doubt in my mind. Again, she makes a mistake, right back at it, next pitch, so what, go after 'em. She comes in and just does her job.

No matter what happens, I had all my confidence in Kelly. We know as a defense we're always going to play behind her.

Q. Kinzie, y'all really dominated Texas up here, especially lately. Do you feel like y'all are in their head, intimidate them?

KINZIE HANSEN: You know, we're just doing our job out here. I mean, I've said before, they came out and they kind of dominated us in the first series we played them.

We've made our adjustments. We're not really looking. Our goal isn't to go out there and kind of get in their face and intimidate them like that. Our goal is to kind of just hammer them in the way that we know how with Kelly on the mound and our staff doing everything they can and with our lineup making adjustments pitch by pitch.

I mean, we're looking forward to a good game tomorrow. I know that Texas, they're not no softies. They're not going to roll over. Coach White does a great job getting them pumped up for stuff like that.

Yeah, if they feel that way, they're going to come out and try to bow up to us, for sure.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about your senior class. How much are you getting to enjoy that and take it in but also look to the freshmen in the lineup?

KINZIE HANSEN: I'll say that I'm kind of trying not to think about it a little bit. This has been the greatest career that I could have ever asked for with the greatest people that I could have ever asked for. Like just the girls by my side here, Kelly and Tiare, Jayda, Boone, Nicole, Karlie, Lud, everyone, it's just been such a great ride.

Not only has the impact on the softball community been so great, but the impact on one another, the way I have changed, the way I feel. It's just amazing. The way that we've been able to change each other's lives, not only on the field, but like this is a sisterhood for life.

I know that going forward, in the next couple days, this will be the last time we ever wear the Sooners jersey. But these women will be here for each other for every single milestone going forward in life. I think that's what makes -- another reason that makes it so special for us.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap up questions for the players. We'll continue with questions for Coach Gasso.

Q. You always do a great job of game planning. What did you think of your team's offense today against the Texas pitching staff?

PATTY GASSO: That was what won us the game, was really good swings, very calculated, swinging at good pitches, swinging hard.

There are some that want it so bad they'll go in the dugout and get a little discouraged over it. I didn't see any of that. It was just really feeding into the offense.

JT Gasso put together a great game plan. We knew we were going to see multiple pitchers. We turned things on a dime, which was really impressive.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Kelly. She goes all seven. After going eight innings yesterday, was there any concern about fatigue, or was there just a trust that she's going to be ready?

PATTY GASSO: It's a trust because her dream has been -- she's never been this far, and when now you're in the championship series, adrenaline took over for her, as well.

But she's not going to walk away from this opportunity. Our training staff, Amar, Kennedy, our doctors have done a great job just getting her prepared for what's coming. They're going to continue to do it.

I asked her if she wanted the ball. She looked at me like, Duh. I'm like, Okay, we're good.

It's fun to watch her live in the space right now. She's having a blast. She's pushing herself internally to places I don't think she's ever been before. It's beautiful to see really.

Q. How much does experience play a factor when you win one game, have one to go, a roster full of players that have been in this situation? How much do you count on that?

PATTY GASSO: A lot. It means a lot 'cause there's a lot of nerves here. If you get to a place where you can't control it, you're going to lose opportunities, you're going to lose at-bats, you're going to make errors, you're going to throw uncompetitive, non-competitive pitches because you're letting things take over.

But this team has gone forward just very -- I think, to be honest, the game against Florida and the walk-off brought them a different level of joy and confidence. They just kind of brought it right in here. I didn't feel them nervous. I didn't feel any uncertainty whatsoever.

I think the seniors understand the importance of having your feet on the ground the entire time that you're on the field.

Q. How would you describe the kind of psychological edge you just have on this stage, considering your history here?

PATTY GASSO: Well, there's a lot of fans that are for you, and you try to play off of anything that you can. There's fans, there's their family in the stands. I don't even know really how to explain it except once we did it once, they knew how to do it a second time, they knew how to do it a third time. They're acting as if they know how to do it a fourth time.

But it's tough. It's tough. Especially as you go deeper into it. They know that. But they're just handling things very professionally and like women. That's what makes me really proud, is that they don't need me as they used to. They're kind of handling a lot of this on their own. It's great to see that.

Q. Prior to Tiare's home run in the first, Texas had not allowed a run at the College World Series. How important was it to get that early lead from the start?

PATTY GASSO: Very important. It's something that we really talked about, is trying to set the tone, give Kelly an opportunity to get settled. Very, very important.

It was a goal of ours. They checked a lot of boxes tonight.

Q. You put Torres in, a cool moment. The ovation she got. Cool moment for her and some of these other players that don't get the shine.

PATTY GASSO: Yeah, I wrote this down. There were a couple highlights for me that are away from the big home runs and so forth. One was Alynah getting back in. She came back into the dugout and she just had this weird look. That hit by pitch turned into a run. She came into the dugout and she was not happy. I'm like, Hey, what?

I just keep getting hit.

I'm like, Okay, it scored a run, we're good, you're back in.

I'm really proud of Avery Hodge, as well. She had some really tough defensive plays. They're quick and they can chop balls. You've got to attack it and pick 'em. She made two really outstanding plays.

There's a lot of underdogs or a lot of names that are not bright in the lights that are getting it done for us. That's another really good feeling. You can't just count on Kelly. Can't just count on Tiare hitting home runs. You've got to make it happen throughout the lineup one through nine. They did a good job tonight.

Q. You mentioned getting Kelly ready. What goes into that? Is it more physical or mental?

PATTY GASSO: If we would have played in another day game, that would have been a little tough for us because of the heat. So it's easier to play at night. It gave Kelly more time to prepare.

There's some things stirring in her internally that's just hard to explain. Just feels at peace about what's going on. She's not chasing. She's not feeling nervous. She's got a peace with her team about what she's doing, how she's doing it.

What was really cool is seeing her come out in the seventh and just pumping it. She was getting after it. It was really, I don't know... I'll sit back, one day many years from now I'll write a book and tell you all about the behind-the-scene things. I don't want to put it out there right now.

As a coach, it is absolutely beautiful to watch. It's life-changing for a lot of these athletes. It's awesome.

Q. You mentioned you're not overly exuberant. What is your secret as a coach to keep them in that ring, they know there's still work to do?

PATTY GASSO: I think for me, I hold in a lot of emotion. When it comes out, you don't want to be around. I hold it in. I try to keep it very steady. I don't get too high, I don't get too low.

When we went into the locker room, they were kind of banging. But it was like, hey, great job, everybody did their job. It wasn't throwing water at each other. It wasn't doing all of that. It was just knowing the importance of staying focused in what we're doing.

This game is great to have in your back pocket. We talk about that a lot. But you can't live on that. There's just really a lot of softball left. It's our goal to play well.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for Oklahoma.

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