

Louisiana State University Baseball Media Conference

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Paul Mainieri

Skip Bertman

Press Conference

BILL FRANQUES: It is with great pleasure and a tremendous honor for me to introduce for LSU Fighting Tigers, Coach Paul Mainieri.

PAUL MAINIERI: Thank you. Well, this is not necessarily a day I've been looking forward to, I've got to be honest with you.

But it is a day to reflect a little bit on some things. It's been amazing the outpouring of love and affection that I've been receiving from so many people. I've just been overwhelmed today with text messages and e-mails and phone calls and so much -- it's really just been overwhelming. I don't really feel that I'm deserving of it all. It's just so much appreciated, and I'm going to get back to everybody in due time.

It's been a pretty emotional couple of days. Before I talk about how I arrived to this decision, I'll tell you that I'm the luckiest guy that I know because when I was a young boy growing up in South Florida as the son of Demie Mainieri, my mentor, my father, my idol, my best friend (tearing up) I'm going to try and get through this, I'm sorry.

All I ever really wanted to do was be a college baseball coach, and I told him that when I was 14 years old. And you know, who gets to fulfill their childhood dream? And I got to do that. Not immediately. I became an assistant coach and I loved it. I was an assistant for my best friend, Jim Hendry who later on became the head baseball coach at Creighton University and took them to the College World Series and then became the general manager of the Chicago Cubs.

When Jim left to become an assistant coach at Creighton University, I naturally thought I would be promoted to become the head baseball coach at Columbus High School, but unfortunately the brothers at Columbus High School had different plans. They decided to promote another brother in their religious order to be the head coach, and although I understood that, it kind of put a



detour on my plans for my career.

Fortunately for me, there was a small college in Miami. At that time it was called Biscayne College, later St. Thomas University, where I had received my masters degree. I was getting my masters degree at night, along with Jim, in a sports administration program, and their athletic director as a basketball coach, a man by the name of Ken Stibler.

So the job at Biscayne College was open and I called Ken Stibler and asked him if he had filled the position and he said he had not but had somebody in mind, but he had not offered him the job yet. And I was able to convince him to interview me before he offered that other person the job.

And then I was able to convince him that a 25-year-old that had never been a head coach even in high school, that I was the right man for the job. Of course, the job only had two scholarships, it had a terrible field and there had never been a coach there for more than two years and they had never had a winning season.

But he gave me an opportunity for the grand salary of \$3,200. Now, I was the happiest guy in the world because I had fulfilled my dream of becoming a head baseball coach in college, and I don't know that Karen was the happiest person in the world for \$3,200. But she was so supportive of me because she knew it was my dream to become a college coach. It was hard but we did it and I got to start my career, and you know, I threw myself into it, and that's how it all started.

Six years later, the United States Air Force Academy decided to civilianize their head coaching position and I was fortunate enough to land that job, and we up rooted the family, three small children under the age of five, and Karen was awesome and we moved the family out to Colorado Springs. And I had the great privilege of coaching these cadets who later on were going to become the leaders of our country.

What an awesome responsibility. I was so grateful to have that awesome responsibility to be a mentor to these young men who later on were going to be putting themselves in harm's way to be the custodians of our way of life. And I took that responsibility very seriously, and I'm proud to be able to say that I'm probably the only coach in America that can claim to have as former players, four general officers in



our Armed Forces, and the coach at the Air Force Academy, Mike Kazlauskis, is one of my former players after he had a flying career and retired as a major, as a C-17 pilot.

So I loved the Air Force Academy, as I loved St. Thomas University and I thought I'd be there for ever.

And then one day out of the clear blue, I get a phone call from the University of Notre Dame from the athletic director, first of all, let me mention the athletic director's name at the Air Force Academy, Colonel John Clune, who unfortunately passed away one year after he retired, but he was an unbelievable man and a great mentor for me.

Then the athletic director at the University of Notre Dame, Dick Rosenthal, called me out of the clear blue one day and wanted me to talk to him about the job at Notre Dame. There was only one problem. My wife, Karen, was pregnant, literally, ready to have a baby any day, my youngest son, Tommy.

So I couldn't go visit with them until she was ready to have the baby. So we had to wait patiently for Tommy to enter our world and once he did the next day I flew out to South Bend and Dick Rosenthal offered me the job and we decided to go ahead and take it.

It was an awesome experience. As hard as it was to leave the Air Force Academy, going to Notre Dame for 12 years was an amazing opportunity and a real privilege, and I thought I would be there for ever. In fact, I turned down several jobs, including a few in the SEC. In fact, Skip tried to -- Skip is it all right if I let go a little secret?

Skip tried to get me to go to the University of Georgia and become the baseball coach at one point during my time at Notre Dame. Vince Dooley had asked him to find a baseball coach for him, and I was very honored, but decided I was going to stay at Notre Dame.

And I was never going to leave Notre Dame. And then one day, I got a phone call from Skip Berkman, and again, my life was changed forever, because that was the only school that I would have even considered leaving Notre Dame for. When Karen and I came to a visit to Baton Rouge, picked us up at the airport and visited with Skip and Wally, my teammate from LSU, was very involved in the process; we visited all day about the job.

Skip was just the most amazing person because, you know, we have known each other since I think I was 11 years old. I don't know how old Skip was at the time, but our families were very close in South Florida while Skip was the coach at Miami Beach High School, and he was a

legend even back then. My father was the coach at Miami-Dade North Community College.

I've told the story many times, everybody thinks that Skip was a great coach but I can dispel that rumor because he used to work with me in my backyard with my hitting and if you ever saw me hit, it would dispel the myth that Skip was a great coach because I couldn't hit a lick.

But our families were close and I followed Skip's career and he followed mine. When I came down, we could have very honest, open conversations with each other about whether this was the right thing for him and whether it was the right thing for me.

After spending a day together, we both decided that it was the right thing, and I was so flattered that the greatest baseball coach in the history of our game had so much confidence in me, that I was the right guy for the job here; it was impossible for me to turn him down.

I had people back in South Bend saying, why would you want to go there? Skip is so territorial over the baseball program. He won't let you -- he's going to tell you what to do, and it was exactly the opposite of that. He was an unbelievable mentor for me. He was a great counsel for me. I could go to him with anything. He never tried to push me to do anything, you know, that I didn't want to do. He did nothing but support me every step of the way and was my greatest advocate and ally.

I don't know if we would have ever had the success that we had if Skip was not here with me every step of the way, and I'll be forever grateful for him not just for bringing me here to Baton Rouge and giving me this opportunity, but for the way that he guided me through the time here. Thank you, Skip.

So, became the coach at LSU. The first year was a challenge. I never worked so hard in my life. We went 29-26-1, and sometimes you do your best work when the results don't really show out there on the field because we really worked hard that first year. You know, we had some unbelievable kids. Jared Bradford was probably the most amazing year of pitching that I've ever seen. We won 12 games that year in conference play and Jared Bradford either won or saved ten of the games.

Michael Hollander was a tremendous leader of that team. He was our shortstop and he was a gamer. And we had some freshmen that the previous staff had recruited that we played every day, Jared Mitchell, Blake Dean, Sean Ochinko, Ryan Schimpf, and they formed the cornerstone of our team. And we went through some real growing pains that first year, but I knew that we had some talent.

But we had to get them into the right frame of mind to act and to think like winners.

And it was a process. Some kids stayed and some kids didn't. But the ones that stayed bought into the system, so to speak, and they bought into what I wanted to see out of the LSU baseball players.

Then our staff, Cliff Godwin and Terry Rooney, they went out and recruited a great class. DJ LeMahieu, Micah Gibbs, Anthony Ranaudo and on down the list. It was the No. 1 recruiting class in the country, and we started the 2008 season and I knew we had a better team. And, in fact, I told our team that fall before we ever played a game in the spring, I said 2008 -- Anthony is in the room somewhere, and Anthony will remember this.

I told the team in August, 2008 season will be the last time that anybody will ever take LSU lightly again, which was a pretty bold comment coming off of a 29-26 season.

And we started out rather slowly. In fact, it was pretty -- it was not very well. We were 40 games into the season if I remember correctly. We were 23-16-1. We were 6-11-1 in conference play with four weeks to go.

But I knew we had a good team. It was just we were this close: One more pitch, one more play, one more at-bat. I used to tell the kids, "We're this close."

And then I'll never get on a Tuesday night at Tulane, we had second and third and one out, Matt Clark was up who had led the country in home runs that year, came up, here is our chance, eighth inning, one out, and Matt Clark strikes out. And you could just feel the dugout just kind of deflate.

And then this freshman, DJ LeMahieu, steps up and like he's doing for the New York Yankees now, smokes a line drive over the second baseman's head for a two-run single and all of a sudden instead of being down 4-3, we're up 5-4.

And the dugout is alive. And we go out there in the bottom of the eighth inning and we shut Tulane down and go to the top of the ninth and Micah Gibbs hits a two-run double and all of a sudden we are up by three and Paul Bertuccini closes them out in the bottom of the ninth inning and we had this great victory. And I huddled the team up in right field after the game and I said, "See, this is what it took. We just needed that one big hit. We just needed that one big pitch. This is what we are capable of doing. And now we're going to go on a roll."

Well, little did I know that that was going to be Game 1 of a

23-game winning streak. We didn't lose again the rest of the season. We won all four weekend series. We swept through four weekend series. We won all the mid-week games. We went to the SEC Tournament. We swept through the SEC Tournament. We swept through the Regional and had the Super Regional for the last games in the old historic, old Alex Box Stadium against Cal Irvine, and the 23-game win streak gets snapped on opening night, and our backs are against the wall. We either have to win or the season's over and the old Box is going to be closed down.

Here we are in the eighth inning, losing by three, I believe. Was it three, Anthony? I think we were losing by three. And we start to rally. Leon Landry walks and base hit and base hit. Next thing you know, we're up by two and we go to the ninth inning, and Louis Coleman closes them out and we win 9-7.

The next night, the place is jammed. I think the fire marshal took the night off because there were people sitting in the stairwells and everywhere else. You couldn't hear yourself think in old Alex Box stadium and we had back-to-back to back hole runs in the first inning. We hit seven home runs that night and we win 21-7 and go to Omaha and close-up the old Box in the most appropriate way.

Now we didn't win the National Championship but we had a tremendous victory out there when Blake Dean hit a bases-loaded double against Rice to walk them off. But it set the tone for the next season when we started out preseason No. 1 and we end up winning the National Championship in the first year of the new box. What an amazing two-year period that was.

We never won another National Championship, and that was disappointing to me. And I feel like we let down a lot of people by not doing that. But it certainly wasn't because of lack of effort, and it wasn't because we didn't have great teams.

Alex Bregman came in here, and I love that kid like a son, and it kills me that we didn't win a championship when he was here. We won 156 games during his three-year stretch, an average of 52 a year.

In 2013 we went to Omaha with a 57-9 record and we lose 2-1 to UCLA. You know, we lose 5-3 to UCLA. We had the bases loaded in the eighth inning and couldn't get the hit. Man, Skip made it look easy, but it's hard to win national championships. I found that out the hard way, unfortunately.

But we were a national seed many years. We had great



teams. We just couldn't quite win that last game. 2017, man, we beat Oregon State two games in a row when they were 56-4. It felt like we won the National Championship but we just couldn't beat Florida in those last couple of games. You know, I hurt for Kramer and all of them because they deserved a National Championship but we just came up a little bit shy.

You know, we did the best we could. I'm so proud of all the kids that we had through those years because, you know, they took heat for not winning the championship, but they gave it their all. I think that they should be very proud of what they accomplished while they were here.

The craziest thing happened to me after the 2018 summer. I got to coach the USA national team. It was like the thrill of my life next to winning the National Championship, I should say, professional life. I got to manage the USA national team, and it was unbelievable. I had some of my best friends on the coaching staff. We spent three weeks together. We beat the Taipei team and we went to Cuba and beat the Japanese team in a series. It was thrilling to put the USA uniform on, and it was fulfilling a bucket list thing on my list.

Later that summer after we got back, I fulfilled a promise to my wife to go to Toledo, Ohio to visit the gravesite of her parents, and when we threw flew home, I had this stiff neck after we got off the airplane and thought I slept wrong or something. But for some reason, this stiff neck wouldn't go away. A couple months ago, I still had this terrible stiff neck.

So anyway, it's just been -- it kept bothering me for a couple of months, and eventually I sent the X-rays and the MRI to one of my former players from Notre Dame who is a surgeon up in Chicago, and he diagnosed the problem and said that I needed to have surgery. So I went to Chicago and had this surgery on my neck. It helped quite a bit but it didn't totally take care of the problem.

So I went to see another surgeon down here and he felt that I needed another surgery on another level on my spine, and I ended up having another surgery, and it helped some, as well.

But I've just been having this terrible neck pain, really, for about almost three years now, and it's kind of morphed into these headaches and so forth. So I just have not felt well for almost three years now. And it affects my sleeping and it affects the way I feel during the day. I've had so many people tell me, you know, friends being very honest with me, man, you look awful, in a very delicate way. They just tell me, you look awful.

I say, well, I feel the way I look. Anyway. I just haven't felt myself for the last couple of years. And I think it's really affected the way (tearing up) sorry.

I think it's affected the way I've been able to coach because as a coach, I think that one of my greatest strengths has been to be very engaged with the players, you know, pitching batting practice and talking to the players and just getting active with them. I just haven't been able to do that as much the last couple years.

And consequently, I just don't feel like I've been the same coach. I don't think I've been a bad coach but I just don't think that I've been the same coach. And fortunately, we have a great staff, and those guys have really carried the load, Alan and Eddie and Nolan have just been phenomenal. They have done just fantastic work and picked up the slack because I just don't feel like I've been carrying my weight.

So yesterday morning, I got up and Karen and I talked about it quite a bit. I had been thinking about it for several months, and I reached out to Scott and asked him if he was in town and if I could come and visit with him, you know, and I just told him that I just had not been feeling well, and I just thought that maybe the program (tearing up) maybe the program would be better served if somebody else was leading it.

And let me tell you, it hurt to say that because I love coaching, and I love doing what I'm doing, what I've done for 39 years. It's all I ever wanted to do, really. I was worried how Scott would react, but I can't even begin to express to you how fantastic Scott was to me; the compassion that he showed and I mean, what an amazing leader. You know, just a phenomenal person, compassionate, and just made it very easy for me to talk to him about it.

And so we agreed that I should step down. And I wanted to talk to him yesterday about it, because I've been thinking about it long enough. I had been thinking about it for, you know, really, a few months. It wasn't a snap decision. I thought if I wait until, you know, if we get a bid and we play next weekend and we win next weekend and then it's a Super Regional and then we get to Omaha and so forth, and we keep delaying and delaying, and then I take a week to think about it or two weeks to think about it, I just feel like I'm setting the program behind, and I didn't want to do that. You know, kids are going into transfer portal all the time. Kids need to know what their situation is, and I didn't want to -- I wanted to give Scott and his staff a chance to find my replacement in a timely fashion to where the program could be strong for next year. And I think it can be strong. I think there's a really good foundation. I think

we can win a Regional and I think we can win a Super Regional and I think we can still go to Omaha if we get the opportunity next week. I really do believe we will get the opportunity and I think we can play well and I think we can make something out of this year.

I also believe that there's a really good foundation. When you have guys like Morgan and Crews as young kids and some of those freshmen arms have started to emerge, I think there's a very strong foundation there.

And whoever the new coach is going to be, they can come in and they can fill some holes and get some pieces, and I think they can be a championship club. We can be a championship club in a very, very short time. And I want that to happen. I'm going to live in Baton Rouge. Karen and I just built a house in St. Gabriel. My son, Tommy, just graduated from LSU dental school. Very proud of him. He's going to practice right over there on Highland Road. We're going to live one house removed from my daughter, Samantha, and my son-in-law, Nick, and my two grandchildren.

I'm going to be the biggest fan and supporter of the LSU Baseball program. Skip and I will be watching the games together hopefully. You know, we'll be second-guessing that guy out there, why didn't you bunt? Why did you bunt? Why did you leave him in so long? Why did you take him out so early.

You know, I want to see the program continue to prosper. I want to see them continue to get better, just like Skip wanted me to succeed and see the program succeed. I want the same thing for the next coach and for these kids that are in the program now.

So this decision was my decision, and it hurt to make this decision because it's what I've done my whole life. It's going to be weird waking up one morning and not being a coach anymore.

But I'm also very excited about the rest of my life. Karen and I are going to enjoy our life, and we're going to do some things that we haven't been able to do. I've got a bucket list. I want to go to the Kentucky Derby. I want to watch the Masters. I want to go to the Indianapolis 500. You know what I want to do, really? I want to go visit former players. I don't want them to come to my funeral some day. I won't be able to enjoy them. I want to enjoy them while I'm alive and I want to see how the fruits of my labor have turned out and see their families what they have become. One of them operated on me so I know one of them is successful. I had all the confidence in the world when he opened my throat and inserted a prosthetic disk into my vertebrae. That's what Skip and I do. You think

we're in the business to win games and win championships? We're not in that at all. We're in it to prepare kids for life after college and that's what we went into this business for.

I want to go see and visits kids and see how successful they have become, and see the families that we have raised and how they are doing with their lives. So I'm not -- and then Scott and Stephanie have invited me to help out with the athletic department in some way. I'm not really sure what they have in mind, but whatever they want me to do, I'll do it because I love LSU and I think the world of the leadership of our program.

We've gone through a little bit of a tough stretch but these people are tough and they are great and they are great human beings, and we're going to survive anything that came our way. If I can help in any way, all they need to do is ask and I'll be there for him and I hope that I can of help somewhere in some way.

It's been really the honor of my life to serve this university and to be the baseball coach for 15 years. You know, Skip Berkman had the confidence in me (tearing up). I told Skip when I came here, that my only goal was to make him proud and I hope I've done that. Did my best.

Does anybody have any questions?

Q. The neck pain, is that really ultimately just what did it, the amount of pain and chronic headaches you've been dealing with this year and throughout the last three years?

PAUL MAINIERI: It's been a lot. It's been a big factor. I can't say it's the only factor. It's been a big factor. I know you've had neck pain, so you know how debilitating it can make you feel. It didn't -- I'm not an -- I mean, I'm not incapacitated or anything like that. I want to see if -- I hope it's the stress of the job that has made it worse, you know what I mean. If I'm not the baseball coach, and the stress of feeling like, you know, you've got it all on you, I'm hoping that's what it was and that by not being the baseball coach, it will feel better.

You know, this job is totally encompassing. It's with you 365 days a year 24 hours a day. I'm looking forward to smiling a lot more and laughing a lot more and being around my family and engaged with my family on Mother's Day. I don't want to be like the person over there in the corner worrying about who is tomorrow's starting pitcher instead of being engaged with my family, and I'm hoping it will feel a lot better when I'm not stressed out all the time.

So I don't know, I thought I would be feeling better by now,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

but I don't know. I couldn't give you a percentage of how much it's been a factor. There's other issues, too, you know, but it's hard to quantify them all.

Q. In this decision, coming to grips and realizing you can't coach the way you want, but you love the game so much you didn't want to leave it; was that going back and forth in your head? Because you've always wanted to fight through stuff no matter what.

PAUL MAINIERI: You know, just imagine giving up writing. You know, if you had to give up writing, even though you know it was the right thing to do, it's something you've done your whole life. I love baseball and I love coaching. I love impacting kids' lives, and then all of the custody, you're not going to do that voluntarily, even though you know it's the right thing. Standing out there on the field today during practice, I know it's the right thing, I know I made the right decision. In my heart, I know it, but it's still hard.

Karen and I have talked about this, and quite frankly, there's been times when she's said, "I think you might regret this decision."

And my response to her was, "Yeah, I will regret it some days." If you did something that you loved for 39 years, how can you not regret it some days? If you didn't regret it, what would that say about the last 39 years of your life; that you were miserable? I've loved what I've done. And there's going to be days where I wish that I hadn't made this decision because I'm going to miss it terribly. But there's going to be times when I'm going to say I know I did the right thing.

Listen when I had to make the decision to leave Notre Dame to come to LSU, it didn't mean that I knew 100 percent of the time that I did the right thing because I missed Notre Dame when I came here. I know people don't want to hear me say that but it's true, because I loved the time that I was at Notre Dame and there were days when I said, "Man, I hate that I left there." Didn't mean I loved LSU any less. I just hated leaving there.

And it's not going to mean I'm not glad I'm retired and doing something else and being with my family or doing something else, but I'm going to miss coaching. I'm going to miss baseball. I'm going to miss being with the kids and the thrill of victory.

It's pretty hard to describe what it's like to be standing on that top step and looking around Alex Box Stadium and seeing 10,000, 11,000, 12,000 people on their feet and being so loud you can't even hardly hear yourself think, and seeing the support up there and seeing people like

Billy and knowing how much it means to other people, you know, and knowing that you're playing a role in making people happy.

When I walk down the street and people wave to me and say, "Hey, Coach, go get 'em," that's not an ego thing but it makes me proud. It makes me feel good that you're playing a role in something that matters to people. I'm going to miss that. I'm going to miss that.

I'm not going to miss some things. I'm not going to miss getting walked off at Tennessee; I can tell you that. That's miserable.

Q. I heard today you went to Coach Bertman's house and told him personally of your decision. What made you want to do that? Talk about how much he's meant to you in your career here.

PAUL MAINIERI: Well, if I didn't do that, then there's something wrong with me. The only reason I'm here is because of Skip. That was a priority for me.

First thing I did was talk to my coaches and the rest of the staff and I talked to them all individually this morning. Then we had a team meeting at 11:30 and I think it was 10:30 when I drove to Skip's house. I was a little pressed for time but I couldn't talk to the team until I talked to Skip first. That was a major priority for me.

I mean, I love the man. He means everything to me. Like I said I've known him since I was probably 11 years old and I've always admired him. I don't know if there was anybody else would I have even come to LSU.

When Karen and I came to LSU, Tommy was going into the sixth grade, but Samantha was going into her sophomore year in college. Alexandra was going into her senior year at ball state, and Nick had just graduated from Notre Dame and was going to start a job in the Notre Dame fastball office.

So by us coming to LSU was like sending three of our children away at one time, and we had always had our children all around us. I always give credit to Tommy. I told Tommy, if it wasn't for him, even with Skip, I would have never taken the LSU job. We had to have at least one child with us, and if it wasn't for Tommy, we could have never come down here, you know.

But you know, Skip was just that person that I just admired him so much. I respected him so much; that when he showed that kind of confidence in me; that he wanted me to be the coach here and he thought I was the right person and he explained to me why he thought I was the right

person, I mean, how can you not be terribly flattered by that; that, combined with the bought of, okay, I think I was 49 years old at the time, and I said to myself, I've always told my players in the biggest games, you can't be afraid. You've got to go out there and you've got to let it rip. The big games are yours because you're going to be more confident than the other team and you're not going to be afraid and you're going to go for the gold. You're not going to be scared.

I kind of looked in the mirror and I thought, man, I'd better start taking the advice that I give my players all the time, take it personally. I can't not go to LSU because I'm afraid of failure for myself. I might go down there and crash and burn, but I've got to take my swings at it. The combination of not wanting to go through life regretting anything and wanting to fulfill Skip's belief in me were the reasons that I took the job at LSU.

And I'm so glad that I did. Listen, there's been some rough times. We haven't won every game. You know, we haven't won every championship. We've had a lot of success but we've had some difficult moments, too. But it changed our life forever. All of my children have met their spouses here. Our lives have been enriched by coming to Baton Rouge. We've made friends. Everything good has happened to us here. You've got to believe. You've got to believe in yourself and you've got to go for it, and that's the mental I always give to our players, without great risk does not come great reward.

Q. I'm sure we would all like to thank you for your time and your patience and your education that you provided us throughout the year. Congratulations to your family, as well, for getting their father and husband back. How did the meeting go with your team and how do you see the rest of this season now that you have this announcement? How do you see the rest of the season unfolding?

PAUL MAINIERI: Well, it was hard to talk to the team. You know, when I recruit -- when we recruited those players, really, Nolan did most of the work, and Eddie and Alan, of course, contributed greatly.

But when we recruited the players here, it was my intention to see them all through their career. I have three years left on my contract. So I didn't want them to feel like I lied to them, and I apologized to them for that. It was not my intention to retire this year when I recruited them. I didn't want them to lose respect for me, to think that I misled them in any way.

So I asked for their forgiveness for that, No. 1.

But No. 2, I also told them that LSU is LSU and the leadership of the athletic department is the best there is, and they were going to go out and find the very best baseball coach in the country to come to LSU. I have no doubt about that. So they should not be alarmed at all that Paul Mainieri is leaving, because they are going to find a great baseball coach and they should be very confident in that fact for the rest of their career here.

And the next thing we talked about was, you know, that on Monday, there's going to be a selection committee. And I'm proud of our team. Look, we didn't accomplish what we typically accomplish at LSU during the regular season and the SEC Tournament, but I'm also proud because there were times when they could easily have given up, and we haven't given up. We didn't accomplish everything we should have. There certainly are areas we could have done better in, but they didn't give up. And if we get an opportunity to get in the NCAA Tournament, I feel very confident that this team is going to go out and play their hearts out next weekend, and I'm all in. I'm not retired yet. The season is not over yet. I believe wholeheartedly that we'll get a bit, and if we do, the coaching staff is going to be totally engaged and where are we get sent, we are going to lay like LSU Tigers are supposed to play. And I think we can win a Regional and then we'll think about a Super Regional after that.

I think the guys had a great practice today and we'll practice again tomorrow. We'll take Sunday off and we'll watch the selection show on Monday and hopefully our name will get called. If it's not called, then we'll deal with it at that time.

Q. We appreciated covering you for 15 years and always appreciate you returning phone calls and just being great to the media. I talked to a few of your players today and they said you would drop in on class to make sure they are going to class and make sure they were doing the right things off the field, and it's hard to remember anybody ever getting in trouble in your 15 years. What pride do you take in the fact that the guys represented the program so well off the field? And thank you for kind of being hard on them while they were here.

PAUL MAINIERI: Well, it starts in recruiting. If you recruit good kids, then typically you're not going to have a lot of problems.

So we're pretty selective in the kids that we recruit. When we recruit them, we tell them what the expectations are. We don't pull the wool over their eyes and just sugarcoat everything. We talk to them about what the expectations are for their behavior off the field, and how we want them

to play on the field.

So it's not prison. You know, we want them to have fun and enjoy themselves, but to be a member of the program, we expect a certain way to act and be representatives of LSU. I think the kids for the most part buy into that and they understand that's a responsibility that when you're an LSU athlete, you're under the microscope and you should conduct yourself in a certain way.

So I'm pretty proud of the way that you're players through the years have represented our university. I get a lot of compliments from people in the public about how polite our baseball players are. They sign every autograph. They are polite to youngsters. They give great advice to young kids and do the right thing most of the time, and that's something I take an awful lot of pride in. You know, and then they go out and be successful once they leave here.

You know, most of them graduate. I forget the statistics, Bill knows them, about how the kids that have finished their careers here at LSU -- do you remember what that number is, Bill? I want to say there's been like 133, something like that, 133 kids that have finished their careers at LSU. That doesn't include some transfers or whatever, but 133 kids that have finished their playing careers at LSU; 132 of the 133 have either signed professionally or graduated or both. I'm pretty proud of that.

You know when you come to LSU, you're supposed to prepare yourself for life after LSU. That's the first question I ask kids at our first team meeting: Why did you come to LSU? What are you supposed to gain by coming to LSU? And usually one kid will answer, "Win a National Championship." Good answer, but that's not exactly the right answer.

Somebody will invariably raise their hand and say, "To graduate." Good answer, but that's not exactly the right answer.

What you're doing is prepare yourself for life after LSU. That's why you go to college. So if you prepared yourself as an athlete that you were good enough to sign professionally, you've prepared yourself, or if you've graduated, now you've prepared yourself for the working world.

But I think the thing maybe I'm most proud of, I want to say we've had maybe 25 players that signed professionally, including Anthony Ranaudo who was a first-round draft choice who signed professionally after they graduated because they signed after their junior year; they came back to school and finished their degree while they were in professional baseball. How many first-round draft choices

comeback to college and finish their degrees? We had I think four or five first-round draft choices that have done that Mikie Mahtook, Anthony -- Anthony, do you remember the others?

I want to say there's four or five first-rounders that have done that. I'd have to go back and check the list. 25 players signed professionally and then came back and finished their degrees. I mean, those are things I'm really proud of.

But that's not because of me alone believe me. It's because we had this Cox Communications Academic Center, and they are the ones that have the program set up. Scott Woodward is the one that gives them the resources to operate that, and they have had great program over there that gives these kids the opportunity to graduate and prepare themselves for life after LSU. They are crazy if they don't take advantage of it. So I'm proud of it.

Q. You've always been great personally with me and the DI staff, so we say thanks. In Omaha after you've been eliminated, you've always been -- you took the losses hard as you put your arms around your players, and you said it was always so much rougher because of the players, how you felt for the players. Why was that such a strong bond when seasons would end just short of National Championships and you're relation to the players?

PAUL MAINIERI: Well, it just goes back to why I went into coaching in the first place. I was the son of did he meany manner I. I was 14 years old and I told him I wanted to be a baseball coach, and when he asked me why, I said it was because I watch you and the relationship that you have with your players, and I see the way that you impact their lives. That's what I want to do. I want to impact young people's lives."

So whether I coached at St. Thomas, whether I coached at Air Force or whether I coached at Notre Dame or LSU, listen, the pressure to win ratcheted up with each passing job but my passion for coaching never changed. It was always about the kids for me. I was a teacher and an educator first and foremost.

A lot more people cared about the program at LSU than they did at St. Thomas university; I'm talking about externally, but that didn't change the fact that I was a teacher and an educator of young people. I'm teaching life lessons with those kids, and sometimes their life lessons are taught by disappointment and failure.

You know, when you have disappointment and failure, you

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have two choices. You can lay there and feel defeated and feel sorry for yourself and go through life feeling like a loser or you can pick yourself up by the bootstraps and come back and show what kind of a person you are and make something out of yourself. Who is supposed to teach them those lessons? That's what the coach is supposed to do, and what's the role that I thought I had.

It's hard sometimes because you're disappointed as a coach and you're going to be criticized because you're the one being held responsible for everything but you can't ever forget as the coach, you're supposed to be there for the players. That's your No. 1 responsibility. Sometimes we lose sight of that I think in our profession. I hope I never did. I don't think my father would have ever let me.

Q. As you mulled over this decision, was there any element of you and your family trying to savor it as much as you possibly could?

PAUL MAINIERI: I did and I tried to and I kept getting that advice from my oldest son, Nick. My oldest son, Nick is wise beyond his years. When I was going for the decision going interest Notre Dame to LSU, he was amazing counsel. Fathers are supposed to be counsel for their children.

But my son, Nick was great. He graduated from Notre Dame and he was wise beyond his years and he counseled me through it. Even as this year was unfolding and I would kind of talk to him about how I was feeling about things, and he would say, "Dad, just go out there and just enjoy each and every game."

But then what would happen is you would get into the heat of battle -- I hate to use the word battle because it's not war; it's just the competition, the heat of competition. And you want to win so badly -- you know, I just got off the phone with one of my mentors, Ron Maestri, my coach from the University of New Orleans. I didn't curse him out but I said, "Maes, you're the one that I need to blame for who I am." I said, "I played for you for two years and you made every damn game seem like it was the most important game, ever. Like we had to win every damn game, every inning. More so than even my own father. You wore so intense and I took that gene from you." And it aged me, you know, every single damn game was like the end of the world.

Skip coached against Maes, you know how he was -- every pitch, every game, and that's how I was. I might not have shown it externally but that's how I was, and I don't know how many games have I coached, Bill, like 2,200 or something, right? It starts to wear on you.

But yet even at the end, even as I was feeling like this was going to be my last season, and I just tried to enjoy it and smell the roses, you want to win the damn game so bad that it was hard to just sit back and say, "Oh, isn't this lovely, we're playing a baseball game, what a beautiful stadium." You want to win and you want your kids to play well and you want them to taste the fruits of victory, and when you don't win, at the end of the day, you know, you're miserable. I hate to say it but you are.

I know in the total scheme of things, the fact that the other team scored more runs than you on a given day and the total scope of life is not that important, but it felt like it was and it takes its toll on you after a while, after 2,200 games. I always told people I was going to donate my internal organs to the Smithsonian, and it would say: "There lie the internal organs of a college baseball coach, see what it does to him." It takes its toll on you when it matters so much.

You know, you put so much into it. I told Maes, I said, "I've always been jealous of that coach in the other dugout that it just didn't seem to matter that much to him; that he could lose." Skip and I talked about this at lunch one day. Some coaches, you play against them and you beat them and they come over and they are smiling and laughing and shaking hands. You know, it's like it didn't even bother them that they lost.

Me, I'll be gracious, but then I want to rip my hair out after a lot. My family knows that, I'm not very good at losing. Unfortunately I've had a lot of practice at it but I'm still not very good at it. But it's who I am, you know. You put so much into it and you want to win.

I don't apologize for it. I do it within the rules, but if you're going to put all that effort into it, you might as well try to win, right. That's the way I always looked at it.

Q. Everybody knows about Skip Bertman and there's a generation now that grew up just knowing you primarily for LSU Baseball. What does that mean to you?

PAUL MAINIERI: I had not really thought of that at all to be honest with you. Skip is the father of modern LSU Baseball. He's the greatest of all time.

Honestly, I just felt like I was the custodian of this baseball program. Honestly, I honestly felt that way. I never came here with the idea that I was going to ever be greatest than Skip Bertman. I did want to be the second-best coach in the history of LSU, I'll be honest with you about that. I never thought I'd ever pass him and I certainly didn't, okay. But I hope I kept the program respectable.

And certainly I hope my legacy not tied to the results of what happened this year. This was not a standard that we are used to here at LSU, at least up to this point. It's not over yet, hopefully, okay.

But I'm proud of a lot of the accomplishments that we've had. We've had some good things happen during my time here. We've had some special moments. One day I'll reflect back on them and be pretty proud of a lot of the things that we did.

But one thing I know, and this is -- I'll tell you this. I've told this story a lot of times that when I was a graduate student at St. Thomas University while I was a high school coach, I had a professor by the name of Joe Hoy who was one of my mentors. During one class, he gave all the students a poem, and I don't remember the entire poem but the name of the poem was "The Indispensable Man," and there was one stanza that I remember -- is that what you call a paragraph in a poem, a stanza? Okay. I'll paraphrase it to some degree, okay.

He said: If you want to know how indispensable you are, fill a bucket with water, clench your fist, stick your fist into the bottom of the bucket of water, and then remove your fist, is the hole that remains will be how much you'll be missed. And I've always remembered that. In other words, the clock will move forward. Scott and Stephanie will find a new baseball coach. LSU Baseball will go forward. I will become history.

Maybe some people will remember me and maybe they won't, and that will be okay (tearing up) it will be okay, really. I'll have my family. I did the best I could. It gave me a great life. I got to fulfill my dream. I was honored to be the coach here. I didn't accomplish what Skip accomplished, but we did okay. And if people want to remember me, they will remember me, and if they don't, so be it.

But I'm not indispensable. I want the program to be great. I want the new coach to come in here and do better than I did, and I hope he does. And I'm just really proud of the fact that I got to be the coach here for 15 years. I've enjoyed it. I've loved it. I've loved the kids. I've loved my assistants, and I'm really proud of the things that we did. I'm proud of what we produced as players and human beings that have gone through the program, guys like Anthony and his teammates. I'm glad we got to win a championship. I'm glad we got to go to Omaha five times. I'm glad we won eight regionals and I'm glad we did a lot of things we did successfully.

But life will go on, and I'm glad I got to be a part -- a small

part of the history of LSU Baseball. We'll see what the future holds.

(Applause)

BILL FRANQUES: Thanks to Coach Paul Mainieri. Coach Bertman would like to speak and say a few words to Coach Mainieri, as well.

SKIP BERTMAN: It's very tough, since you're nine or ten or eight, every summer you play ball and then you coached, never did anything else. It's very tough. I feel for Paul's emotion up here.

But the reason I wanted to talk, No. 1, is I asked Scott Woodward first if I could say something. And of course he said yes. Yeah, I hired Paul and I'm very proud of that. I'm very proud of Paul Mainieri and what he's done here. It isn't just measured in this National Championship, but that's kind of silly. It's measured in the young men and how they do. His graduation rate is about as close to 100 percent as you could possibly be. He's never had a problem with the NCAA and he's never had a problem with media or any of you people.

His family, God bless you, Karen, and the children and grandchildren, he managed to have this kind of pressure and his family and not all coaches can do that. Not all coaches have the tension visibility that you have in baseball here at LSU. He wanted to win every game and there's a lot of tension in that, but I respect that very much. Not all coaches do that. I respect them as a person. He has been a beacon of a roam for the players that have been here, and as the media man pointed out, those players will tell you that if you ask them -- I spoke to some media people earlier today, and told them I didn't want to speak to them at that time, and that I would say something here if I could.

Scott gave me permission and I just want to say, I'm proud of you, Paul, and I'm proud of everything that he has done and that he's accomplished. I'm proud of all the players that he's put out there. I'm proud of all the coaches that have been put out there and gosh, so much goes on and so many schools beyond winning and losing, and all kinds of problems. There was never a problem like that. Wasn't even close. I mean, you can't just be a coach here and 150 years of baseball, you pick up a lot of stuff. But Paul's a man. He's a pro. Yeah, he spoke to me. He spoke to the coaching staff. He spoke to the kids. He did it right. He could have waited a longer time but it's better for the school and for Scott that he didn't do that.

He's done everything with class, dignity and I'm proud of what Paul has done as my hire at university and I love you,

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Paul, and I love the family and the way they have managed.

I'm also very happy for Scott, the ad who wants to keep Paul as a man with immense talent beyond coaching baseball. He can be a second party to a Tiger athletic foundation or an athletic development officer and go to lunch and close the deal. I mean, he can do a gazillion things that we need here, and I'm really proud that he's going to be here.

And you're right. Paul and I will now be watching the games together, as I've never missed many games, either here or on TV or on the radio and I'm very excited about Paul. It's a wonderful record.

Let me say this -- check me out here, Bill. He's a guy that's won over 30 different championships if you add in the SEC or the West or you throw in a Regional and Super Regional and so on. That's a lot. And there's only been -- check me out here -- there's only been five coaches in the history of college baseball that have won 1,500 games and a National Championship. He's the winningest-coach in college baseball at this minute, and of course he's still active and I hope that continues.

The kids never quit. They really played like they always have for Paul, and his staff, with a lot of intensity and they have always carried themselves outside with a lot of dignity.

And it's tough to lose and walk through that gate and there's 50 people that ask you for pictures or autographs. Paul's players stood up -- I watched them -- and they did that.

So it's stuff beyond W's. Paul's got a lot of wins and losses and did very well, but he's done all the other things, tremendous, and just wanted to say I'm proud of you.

Does anybody have a question for me about Paul? Because that's all I'm talking about, okay. Thanks a lot -- whoa, Wilson. Question or something?

Q. You obviously said you hired Paul. Could it have gone much better than this? Is this what you envisioned what you had hired? Could it have gone much better than this?

PAUL MAINIERI: The question; what did you envision when you hired Paul. I didn't envision somebody coming in and winning six or seven National Championships. It's not Paul. It's not me. It's the game. The game is a law of large numbers. You put your pitcher out there and ump calls a pitch and one day he calls it a strike but the next

pitch, it's a ball. It's a 50/50 -- all right. That's going to take place. That's the game.

What happens is that -- I've said this many times. Today all the teams are that close (indicating). Boy, it's tough to win. Where is the dynasty guy? Where is the team that keeps going on winning where is he? Nobody's done a better job than Paul's done in 15 years, and that includes all staff, players, graduation, wins and losses and other things and taking care of his family and being a great beacon in the community. He did that. Can't do it any better, I'm sorry.

Anybody else? Thanks, Bill. Thanks, Scott.

BILL FRANQUES: Thank you again for being with us this evening.

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