

College World Series: Baton Rouge Regional

Saturday, May 31, 2025

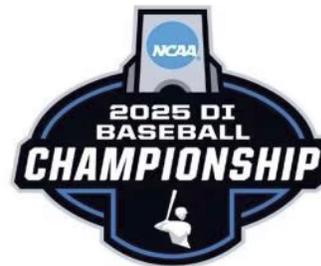
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Rhode Island Rams

Raphael Cerrato

Scott Penney

Postgame Press Conference



Little Rock - 22, Rhode Island - 10

RAFAEL CERRATO: It's just a really tough way to end our season. We had probably our best regular season in program history, broke the school record in wins. Great Atlantic 10 tournament, swept through that.

It's tough, obviously, right after, 10 minutes after a game. It's tough to think of a lot of good things after a game like that. I'm eventually going to reflect on what a great group we have. I mean, I've been saying that all season. What a special, special team that we have, the group of seniors, the leadership. It's one of the best groups I've ever coached in 27, 28 years, whatever it's been, coaching.

I'm just really proud of what we did, and it's obviously tough to take. It would have been -- last night's game was pretty competitive; we had a chance. And then tonight, today, it's obviously a tough comeback. We get home at 2:30 in the morning last night to the hotel. That's certainly not an excuse, but you come back today, and it was a frustrating game.

We didn't play as well as we're capable of playing, and I was hoping that -- you know, it's frustrating because I know how good of a team this is, and I just didn't feel like we played our best baseball in the tournament. Again, like I said, it's 5, 10 minutes after the game, it's tough to take.

Q. Coach, congratulations on your season. I know you're saying no excuse about last night being able to get back late, but just talk about maybe some of those lingering effects on the team that maybe could have played a part in today because it happens.

RAFAEL CERRATO: Yeah, it's unfortunate. It's a situation where I'm looking out the window all day and not seeing any lightning or rain, and we're pushed back and back and back, and we have to start a game at 11:00 p.m. That's

tough. It would have been tough for us or Dallas Baptist. It's just frustrating we have to play that late.

But if we don't play that game, then we have to play a doubleheader, us and Dallas Baptist both have to play a doubleheader today. So that's not an ideal situation either. There's not a lot you can do. I wish it wasn't that situation.

I'm not saying things would be different. They flat out -- Little Rock beat us today. They just beat us. There's not much you can do about baseball and weather and lightning, but they came out -- they waited around for seven hours for their game. So it's not like woe is us. We were just later. Luckily the game got pushed back a little bit, but they beat us. They were the better team today.

Q. My next question is in this ever-changing world of NIL, the transfer portal, you have built a program at Rhode Island. What has that process been like building this program, and where do you go from here?

RAFAEL CERRATO: We want to continue to build. We're not a school that has the luxury of giving NIL. We have to get tough, competitive Northeast kids that love to play baseball.

With our situation with the transfer portal and things like that, you try to give kids the best experience they can possibly have, and winning is a big part of that. Nothing's really changed for me as a head coach since this has happened. I don't think a lot of coaches love what's going on with college athletics right now with the transfer portal, NIL.

We're not an SEC school, we're not ACC, we're not a Power 5. We don't have the luxury of doing that. But you hope to put together a situation where your kids love being part of the program, they develop, we win. Our kids know that we care about them on and off the field, and I believe they do know that.

When you have a great player -- we have some unbelievable seniors on our team that could have played anywhere in the country, but they chose to stay at URI



because they love their friends, their best friends. They love the situation, just being around the staff and support staff.

That's what we have to try to create at mid-major because we don't have all the bells and whistles. You've got to get tough kids that love to play and treat them well, and hopefully they have a tremendous experience at your school and they want to stay and be a part of it.

Q. Scott, I was just wondering, I know it's so soon after the season, but what is going to be your big takeaway from this year?

SCOTT PENNEY: I don't know. A-10 champs, so that's a big part of it. I just love this team. Have to go into next year and see where we're at. I think we've got a good shot at A-10 next year too.

This is probably the best year of baseball I've ever had, this group of guys, and it was fun.

Q. Today they kind of came and punched you guys in the mouth early. What was sort of the conversations like in the dugout there as you all were trying to claw your way back in?

SCOTT PENNEY: Honestly, we were fighting back. They were scoring five, we scored three, whatever it was. At the end, just honestly walks killed us. They had big hits, and they had more big hits than us. It is what it is.

Q. This question is for both you guys. With the success that you had -- and I know it's tough for the season to come to an end the way that it did, but for both you guys, what did you learn in the success this year? Especially like you just said, Coach, being at Rhode Island, you don't have all the bells and whistles, but define success. What did you find out about yourself as a coach and what did you find out about yourself as a player to be at a school like Rhode Island?

SCOTT PENNEY: Well, I'm from Rhode Island. I wouldn't say it's my dream school, but like I always wanted to come here. I just -- I don't know, I love playing for my state, and I love being here.

I probably noticed that even like Power 5 schools, all that, at the end of the game, it's just baseball. We beat Oregon this year. Like if we had a chance at LSU, maybe win or not win, but we would battle definitely, I think.

RAFAEL CERRATO: I don't know how much I learn. I don't think I change a ton. I just think we had such a good

group, and I think they were very good at making adjustments.

Looking at our offense, we put up astronomical numbers for us, basically broke every record in school history, literally almost every one. So that was fun. It's something that I wasn't expecting that. I was expecting our pitching to be stronger. We lost a couple guys to injury that were really, really important.

Looking at the future and the kind of people we want to bring in, just you've got to have some tough kids and gritty kids. That's the good thing about college baseball. Even though on paper you look at us and LSU or even a Dallas Baptist and the facilities and money and scholarships and things they have, you would think we have no chance of competing.

Oregon, go out and play Oregon, with all the resources they have, little Rhode Island with 40 high schools, how is this even possible? That's what's great about college baseball is that we're capable of going out, beating an Oregon, losing another Game 1-0, being up in one of the other games in the middle of the game.

We've always played a really tough schedule, and that's what I love about college baseball. You don't necessarily have to have all that to be really good. We just want to recruit great kids who love to play. This is one of them right here who's as tough as nails and has just improved so much and worked so hard. In his career from his freshman year through this year, took a big step. A lot of our guys did.

We do lose a lot of our hitters, but we're excited about the group we have coming back and the kids we have coming in, and we expect to compete again for a championship. The thing I learned is just one thing is just -- it's just -- it's having a great attitude every day. Like come into the park, and I feel like we do that.

Our kids love being around each other, and it's so important for a team. They really care, and it starts from guys like Anthony DePino and Eric Genther and Trystan Levesque and Rob Butler and some of these older guys that were just phenomenal, phenomenal leaders that brought this group together and made it a special season.

It's tough to take right now, but reflecting back, it will be something super special to look back on.

Q. I just wanted to ask you, kind of similar to what I asked Scott, they come out and punch you guys in the mouth. Did that change how kind of the calculus of the game because you all were playing catch-up the whole

time?

RAFAEL CERRATO: Yeah, it's tough. They jumped on us early. We fought back with three runs right after them. They scored three in the fourth. We came back with four. But we just couldn't stop them, basically today.

I talked to our guys right after going into the bottom of the fourth. We've come back all season. We've been behind. We've hit. Just like just keep at it, just keep getting good at-bats, and we did, but we just couldn't hold them. Couldn't hold them from -- they just did a really good job offensively.

A couple balls found holes; ours didn't. That makes a big difference. But they just did a great job offensively against our pitchers.

Q. Talk about you and your staff and what the developmental process is like for you and this team and this program.

RAFAEL CERRATO: It's a lot of work. I have a great coaching staff with Dave Fischer, our pitching coach, Kevin Heiss, who played for me. He was my shortstop and captain. As a hitting coach, did an amazing job with our hitters this year. Bo Brutti, who played for me as well, pitcher, does our ops, and Blaine Lidsky, who's a local kid who just joined us.

It's just what I love about our staff and our support staff, it's an amazing group. Like we love to come to work every day. There's never a day where we're like, oh, we need to come to work. I think that's always been important to me. I think we created a culture that it's fun, it's loose, without being too loose.

Our guys bust chops all the time. They bust my chops all the time. It's okay. It's just a loose group, but we know when it's time to be serious and do our work and get our stuff done, they're very serious about it. So it's a fine line, but I think -- and it starts with, again, guys who are our leaders. I think Anthony DePino has been one of my best leaders I've ever coached. It starts with those guys are almost more important than the coaching staff.

It's just a lot of work and effort and knowing that our guys, our staff, that we care more about them as people than we do as student-athletes. They know our door is always open, and they can talk to us about anything. Like I said before, it's my goal is I want to have every one of our guys leave our program having a great experience. Winning is hopefully a big, big part of that.

It's about the experience and leaving here and the

memories they have -- being on the airplanes, the buses, the hotels. These are the best friends they're going to have for the rest of their life. It's creating that culture, which I think we have a really good culture of bringing in quality kids who are great teammates.

Even some of the kids that -- what I'm most proud of is some older guys that didn't play a lot this year, but they were phenomenal teammates. I couldn't be more -- I'm as proud of them as a guy like a Trystan Levesque and DePino and Hopko and all those guys that put up crazy numbers. Those guys are just as important to our program as the guys that are out there every day doing it.

I couldn't be more proud of this team. Again, it's a tough way to end the season. It really is. I wanted to be able to show, in a sense, the country what kind of team we are, and I don't feel like we quite did it, but it's baseball. You have a couple games. Last night I thought we played okay. Left a ton of guys on base, they didn't. They didn't make a mistake. They hit three home runs.

Today we just struggled in a lot of different ways. So it's a frustrating end to an amazing year.

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