

2022 College World Series

Thursday, June 16, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Anthony Holman

Mike Buddie

Craig Keilitz

State of Baseball News conference



But I've been sharing with our team and our staff and others that we embrace the change because I think it brings some opportunities for student-athletes and for fans and for everybody around competition.

There may be some hiccups or some hurdles to overcome, but I think this is a resilient association that's been around for a long time. We've got committed individuals, two of which that are here with me now that understand the industry. And I think it will be good that we're more nimble to do some things that are at the best interests of all involved.

So I certainly am not an expert in that space and can't give you guys great detail. All of those things are still being worked out through the membership. And it will evolve and they'll vote on it and we'll determine and we'll move forward. But certainly don't want to not acknowledge that that's going on.

So the other thing that I think is really exciting this time of year that I'm sure you're paying attention to, but the use of technology around both our video review, the statistics that we're able to provide, that we're going to be taking advantage of here at this series and sharing with teams and hopefully utilizing some of our social platforms and venue opportunities to share with fans to make their experience here very similar to what fans may be seeing at home in terms of replay and statistics and TrackMan data and things like that. We're excited about being able to do that here for the first time. So, thank you, again, and looking forward to a great weekend or two weeks of baseball.

MIKE BUDDIE: So thank you. Good morning. It's an honor to be here. This is my third term or partial term on the NCAA Baseball Committee. And so to be named the chair, to represent the other nine members, is quite an honor that I take very seriously.

And Anthony mentioned change. I like to use the word "evolution". I've seen the game evolve in my three terms. In my first trip to Omaha we didn't have replay. We didn't have umpire cameras. We didn't have the great social media presence. We didn't have the awesome home run

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our first State of Baseball news conference.

On the dais today, on the far side, Craig Keilitz, the executive director of the American Baseball Coaches Association; in the middle, Mike Buddie, director of athletics at West Point and chairman of the Division I Baseball Committee; and Anthony Holman, managing director of NCAA Championships.

Let's start with a statement from each of you.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: Appreciate everybody coming out to join us and those joining us via Zoom. We're excited about the opportunity to be back and playing in what I'm calling our new normal, the opportunity to have games and have fans watching and participating and student-athletes coming to the games and prepared to play without necessarily worried about COVID testing and some of those other measures. We're excited about that.

We're thrilled about the format -- I wouldn't call it a change -- but a format modification. Those of you that have been around for a long time will recognize that we had this format previously. But this will ensure that we have competition over both weekends, which is going to be good for us.

We know that we've got a great field of very competitive teams with great traditions and having this format and this schedule allows for some advanced planning and hopefully will help us with great attendance over both weekends.

The other statement, or part of my statement I just wanted to make is we all know that we're at a crossroads with collegiate athletics, not just baseball, with the Transformation Committee that's going on and the work that's being done in that space and the impending change to the NCAA's constitution. There are a number of things that are likely to change.

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celebrations and things that have evolved in our game. We didn't have the one-way communication devices and such. So the game continues to evolve, as it should.

But I'll tell you, the one thing that gets more and more difficult, in my opinion, is selecting the field every year. But it was great to see my colleagues in the room, how prepared they were, how dedicated they are, how open they were to conversation to try our best to set this field, which always proves to be difficult, no matter how many teams we have, there's always going to be the last four in. There's always going to be the first four out. And those are always extremely difficult.

But the one thing that we can rely on which was very apparent this year is the student-athletes delivered. The student-athletes and coaches have made phenomenal -- there were some great storylines in the Regionals, some of the best atmospheres that I've seen at the Super Regionals. And some of the storylines, the successful journeys for these teams to get here to Omaha in a wide-open field, in my opinion.

The parity in our game is great. Watching a team like UConn taking a phenomenal Stanford team to a third game in a Super Regional just speaks volumes to the health of baseball in our communities and growing the game.

So I'm thrilled to be here. Can't wait to get started and play some baseball.

CRAIG KEILITZ: Good morning. I'm excited to be here, not only because we're in Omaha and this is our national championship and this is my eighth year as executive director attending the College World Series, but I'm excited where our game is right now, the quality of play, the quality of our student-athletes, and probably most the quality of our coaching. The coaching has probably never been as good as this has. And because of that I think we're seeing record crowds. The emotion at the games that Mike talked about, the TV coverage is second to none.

And I'm also committed -- or excited about the commitment of our administration towards baseball. The new stadiums, the operating budgets, the increased salaries, increased travel and competition has never been better in my opinion. So I'm excited to see an incredible championship this next couple of weeks and see how it comes out.

And I have no idea who is going to win this. And I couldn't even begin to guess who is going to be favored because it's such a great field. So looking forward to talking to the media about any questions you may have.

Q. Obviously the game has evolved as far as the home

runs and strikeouts. This year you guys have set a tournament record for number of home runs and we're not even to the College World Series first game yet. So I wanted to ask a little bit about just your take on why the big jump this year. It's been trending this way, but it's just a big jump this year. There's 19 teams that hit 100 home runs. Last year there was three. And before that there was hardly ever more than one or two. So are the ball specifications the same? And is there anything that you care to say just about how the thing has evolved?

CRAIG KEILITZ: The ball has not changed for a number of years. The flat-seam baseball has not changed. Talking to coaches, they feel with that COVID year we have older student-athletes, more mature, stronger. And I guess the philosophy on that is takes a little bit more time for hitters to mature. I think the swing plane has been a big difference. But the metrics are able to break down the pitching weaknesses.

But if you watch the games, home runs hit off a guy throwing 95 to 100 miles an hour is absolutely amazing. But they're on it, and when they hit it it seems to go a long ways. I think it's a natural evolution of our game.

We're seeing it at all levels, but I think the additional age difference and the draft going back to five rounds a few years ago and now just at 20, we're seeing better talent and they're catching up to some of the pitching.

MIKE BUDDIE: As a former pitcher, it's depressing to me. (Laughter) I think Craig has certainly hit a lot of facts -- bigger, stronger, faster, every athlete in every sport in my tenure as an athletics administrator. They get bigger, stronger, faster every year.

Pitchers use small muscle groups, which it's harder to get your rotator cuff strong at the same rate as it is to get your biceps and glutes strong.

And much like when Major League Baseball wanted to stop tobacco, they started outlawing it at the youth levels, and then minor leagues weren't allowed to do it. And I think there's something to that, where I think youth leagues now are paying more attention to spin rate and launch angle and all those things. There is science to the success of it.

And as this generation of players continues to mature -- the shift wasn't a thing as recently as 10 years ago because I think hitters tried to be complete and hit the ball the other way. I think that's less taught now, and it's more launch angle and turn and burn, which is why the strikeouts are up. That's why the home runs are up. That's just my opinion.

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ANTHONY HOLMAN: These are the baseball guys. They know that part. I can tell you from the playing rule side, obviously -- and these guys answered it -- the ball hasn't changed. We continue as a part of our evaluation of balance between offense and defense to review those types of things.

But the ball, the coefficient of restitution, all those things are still the same and have been consistent over the past couple of years.

I think we'll look at it now, because when we first moved here, I think there was a big concern about the stadium's too big, and we made some modifications to the ball to balance offense and defense. We'll continue to watch that and study those things and provide kind of guidance or a pivot where necessary. But I think it's exciting, and I think folks have been watching it.

Q. Anthony, since you mentioned it, talking just about the ballpark itself, was there ever any thought about changing the dimensions here, doing any kind of tweaking?

ANTHONY HOLMAN: Changing the dimensions, no. I shouldn't say not at all. Certainly everything was being discussed. But I think the real kind of discussion around balance, offense and defense, has primarily been around the ball, the bat and those things.

I think we feel really comfortable with the way the stadium was designed and been built, and it allows us to do some things here that are unique and folks look forward to coming here.

I think we're pretty happy with the way the stadium has played. And to Mike's point, the talent just has gotten better. And the kids adjusted and just be patient and that's what happens. No changes necessarily in terms of the dimensions.

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