

2022 College World Series

Thursday, June 16, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Stanford Cardinal

Coach David Esquer

Alex Williams

Brock Jones

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach David Esquer, student-athletes Brock Jones and Alex Williams.

DAVID ESQUER: Well, if you're in Omaha in June, it's a good thing. And it has not been a straight line for us.

I'm really proud of this team for just the perseverance they've had to have in order to get here. And I think many of the teams here would say the same thing. It doesn't happen easily, especially coming out of, one, our league, and two, the Regionals and Super Regionals. They were just real battles and wars that we made it through. Couldn't be prouder.

We've earned our trip here. We don't take anything for granted. It's not easy to get here. Even though we had a number of players who had experienced last year's World Series, it was never a certainty that we could necessarily get back here.

So it took a team effort and an unbelievable year by Alex Williams, who was the Pac-12 Pitcher of the Year, and we needed every one of his innings and performances. And Brock Jones, who has been on our team and in the lineup for the last couple of years and has led us. And Brock's last two months have been as good as any player in our conference or in the country. That's really led us.

It hasn't just been him. It's been a number of players that at one time or another have been the most valuable player on our team. I talked about that all the time, that the greatness of our team's we're going to rely on a different hero every night. We're not just going to be one person-centered. It doesn't have to be Brock that carries us, or Alex. It's going to be each and every one of us. And I think we've done that, and that's a big reason why we're here.

Q. Brock, obviously you guys played Arkansas earlier

this year. What are your thoughts on seeing them again, and your memories from seeing them down in Texas earlier?

BROCK JONES: I think it's always good to play a team like Arkansas. It gives us that Texas Tech kind of vibe like we had in our Super last year, where they'll show up and play competitive baseball.

And you never really know. You never really know what you're going to get. That's one of those things you have to love showing up to the ballpark to play a team like Arkansas.

I think earlier in the year we played a really good game. It was a dogfight. We ended up coming out on top and we were right there on the rail. One of our guys Drew Bowser gets hit in the face. We get confrontational a little bit. And we're all on the rail a little bit. And you could show up on Saturday ready for another dogfight.

Q. You won five elimination games in the last couple of weeks. What mentality maybe does that kind of breed in your team? What was it like and how has that maybe toughened you guys heading into this?

BROCK JONES: I think it's always good. We went on that run of 18, 19, 20 wins, whatever it was. And I think we were kind of due for a loss at some point. And I'm glad we got those out of the way earlier than later.

And I think it's good to experience everything before you get to Omaha because you comfortable -- if you get too comfortable you'll be out of luck. And it was one of those things we were got hit in the mouth a little bit, and we were able to take a step back and, OK, we need to show up and get back to work and get ready to go.

I think if you experience those things in Omaha you'll be ready when you get here. And we've touched on pretty much every possible game scenario that we can at this point. We've been up a lot, down a lot, dogfights in between. We've been proud of this group and we're always looking forward to the next game.



ALEX WILLIAMS: I would say winning those elimination games is big. It just kind of showed to me how deep we are. I think as we're winning and playing well, you kind of rely on the same guys over and over. Those elimination games we saw a lot of guys step up that haven't really all year.

I feel like in the last two weeks I realized how good of a team we are compared to the last season. I saw a lot guys step up and have big performances, whether that was Ryan Bruno or Eddie Park, or a lot of younger guys that stepped up in the big moment. And shows how much of a team we are and how much we rely on each other.

Q. I assume Alex being here he's your opener?

DAVID ESQUER: Yes.

Q. Talk about Arkansas what you know of them.

ALEX WILLIAMS: They're a good team. I was on the book, I was doing the charting for Quinn Mathews when he pitched against them back in Texas, was that second week of the year.

I know they're going to be a good team, a good offense. I look forward to facing them. I think it's going to be a good game. I take our offense over their's any days. I think we've got them. I respect them. They're a good team. I look forward to playing them.

Q. Brock, it seemed like you were in a funk earlier in the season and it seemed like the offense was kind of down early through that Corvallis series, going up there and beating Oregon State. What turned your season at that point, you personally and the rest of your teammates at that point?

BROCK JONES: I think what helped us is we never hit the panic button, myself included. It was one of those things we always knew we were good, we had a lot of talent. We had to get back to us and play our brand of baseball.

We were trying to do too much and put too much pressure on ourselves individually. And I think now that the season's gone on and we've experienced what we've experienced, we've also, like you said, we've become closer as a group and we have a lot of faith in our guys.

And Esquie always talks about having a safety net, and you don't have to be the guy every night. But you have that safety net of eight guys beneath you in the lineup that will pick you up if you don't succeed.

Q. I know a tweet went out of y'all getting to see Jacob

Palisch closing out the Aggies' Super Regional. What's the relationship with him like? What have you seen from him this year, and how special is it to be up here with him?

BROCK JONES: I think it's an awesome picture and a post. I was actually talking to Tyler. Some of us were, like, should we have that post because we'll be competing against those guys.

But looking back on it, Palisch is one of us. He's one of the guys that got us here last year. He's been awesome all throughout for them and we couldn't be more proud of him and everything he's accomplished. We're very happy he's back and hopefully we'll see him in the CWS.

ALEX WILLIAMS: To go off that, Palisch, I have a tight relationship with Palisch probably because we're pitchers. He's one class above me. I've known him for a long time.

At the beginning of the season, when he chose to go to A&M he sent me a text, here's where I'm going. Then right before the season he texted me, like, good luck this year. Rooting for the best for up. Can't wait to see you in Omaha.

When I saw him closing that game I texted him. I said, wow, awesome to see you being the one to close it out and send your team to Omaha.

It's awesome, obviously what he said is coming true. I'm looking forward, and hope we get a chance to play them.

Q. Alex, I know how good you were for about a two-month stretch, and to be fair you've not been that good the past three starts. What gets you back to being the guy you were for those two months and not the guy you've been the past three starts?

ALEX WILLIAMS: I think I just gotta get back to the basics. I think when playoffs hit I kind of put a little too much on myself. I tried a little too hard. Like Esquer says, trying harder is not the answer. It's just not.

I think being the older guy and coming into these playoffs I put too much on myself and tried too hard. I have to get back to myself. I know who I am, and know that, like Brock was saying, there's a safety net below me of a lot of guys that can pick me up if I don't.

So honestly just seeing those guys and what the younger guys have done for me to continue to give me more opportunities to pitch, I couldn't be more thankful and more blessed. I'm not going to take that for granted and just go out and be me. And I'm excited to get back out there

again.

Q. When Arkansas beat North Carolina earlier this week there was a lot of talk how meaningful it was for them to get here after what happened with NC State last year. You guys had a tough loss here to end your season last year. How much of a motivation was that for you?

BROCK JONES: I think it's huge. You come back into the park and you immediately, it's the first thought that hits your brain is how you lost last year and how you ended up leaving that all behind.

So I think that's definitely a big motivation. We have a lot of returning guys who were here last year. So I think it's pretty funny. We were walking in the park doing our walk-through yesterday and we were like it's smaller than I remember.

That tells me we're right where we need to be. We're not going to run from it. We're here to face everything and we couldn't be more excited to be back.

ALEX WILLIAMS: I would say there's definitely something about being here before, I think. There's that thirst in our mouth from losing last year. It never left. I was counting down the days to get back here.

At the beginning of the season I was, like, I cannot not wait to get back to Omaha and get revenge and get that chance again.

We've got eight of our nine starters have played here before. I think we have a sense of maturity about us. We know what it's like. The game's not too big for us and obviously we've been waiting for this moment now it's time to go out and play our brand of baseball.

DAVID ESQUER: Probably was a split second of PTSD when we walked back in, remembering last year and then it was gone. This place is so special, and getting an opportunity to face a great Arkansas team. Coach Van Horn, I respect like no other coach. I know he'll be ready.

The big difference is when we played them in February it was 30 degrees maybe and it wasn't the most comfortable brand of baseball. So playing out here in the heat it's going to be, it will be the same type of battle but a lot warmer.

Q. Quinn has been spoken as a reliever/closer. What have you seen about his mindset and the difference in his new role?

ALEX WILLIAMS: Quinn, he's an interesting, different guy,

I think -- he wouldn't be offended by me saying that, not at all. It's just one thing I appreciate about him. He's able to make an adjustment. I think even moving out of the starting role he wasn't the biggest fan of it at first. But he's definitely grown and understood that's what the team needed.

I think the second he went to the pen, I think we went on a 17-game winning streak. I don't think that's the only reason.

But I couldn't be more proud of the way he's handled that role and accepted it. He's finding success there. And obviously it's very nice as a starter to know I've got Quinn behind me. I'm easily able to handle the ball off to Quinn. I couldn't be more proud of what he's been doing recently.

DAVID ESQUER: When Alex said our offense, he said he hopes our offense is better than Arkansas's offense. (Laughter).

Q. Do you think the experience you guys had last year mixed with some of these young guys like Braden Montgomery will help you here in this series being a big ballpark? You hit a lot of home runs. Do you think you can play enough small ball to go win these games?

DAVID ESQUER: You hope so, right? That's something that, the home run teams that come here, does that throw them off their game, if they're not able to produce the power numbers they're used to?

And that will be seen for sure because I think that's something we've relied a little bit on our power. I'm pretty confident that we can play a little smaller if we need to. I'm usually morally opposed to bunting in the first five innings but who knows now with the games as big as they are, we may need one of those.

But I think our ability to drive in runs in a number of different ways and the bottom of our order is pretty flexible and being able to drive in some runs. And we'll just see how the field's going to play.

Q. You touched on this in Round Rock. How difficult were the conditions?

DAVID ESQUER: You know, one of the things I was most proud of my team, it was 30 degrees and they played like it was 75. They didn't complain. There was no excuse-making. And I think Arkansas, they were playing the game like it was a regular game, too.

But from the outside we're watching our team play out



there and it was cool. It was cold. And it was a good, hard-fought game. And it was a really good litmus test for our club where we were at that time.

It probably told us more what we were capable of. I think sometimes we struggle to find that same level of play as the season went on and then got back to it in a different way with a lot more offense. And of course Alex Williams stayed hot the whole year for us, which was big.

Q. From the experience you had on the 1987 College World Series championship team, what lessons or advice do you give to your players about playing here?

DAVID ESQUER: One of the biggest lessons I learned, we went to the College World Series in 1985. And to this day I think it's maybe the best team I've ever played on, maybe because I was a little younger and I looked up to those guys. And we came in ranked No. 1 in the tournament, and we played the eighth ranked team, which was Miami.

And they just smoked us. It was 17-3, and Miami ended up winning the tournament at the College World Series. And I remember our team a little bit, we thought we were pretty confident and we felt like if we go to Omaha and we play well, we'll win. We're No. 1 ranked.

The difference in 1987, we had a bunch of guys that just decided that we didn't care how we played. We just wanted to play each game to win.

And early on in the tournament we didn't play great. We didn't have our best games, but we played well enough to win. And we played well enough to win the next night. We played well enough to have a miracle grand slam in the bottom of the tenth inning against LSU. And then we started to play well.

The last two games we really played good baseball. And you've got to stay in the tournament long enough maybe until you can hit your stride. So I do tell my team it's not about coming out and hitting the ground running, that you may have to hang around and battle well enough to win the games and then eventually hit your stride by the end.

I don't look too much by the quality of our performance. It really is just the competition and can we find a way to win game one and stay in the tournament long enough that hopefully we can play our best baseball by the end.

Q. The good and bad of your pitching the past two weeks, the good has been how great your bullpen certainly in the last two games, and you talked about how Coach Eager was able to mix and match and get you to victories when you didn't get a whole lot of outs

from your starters. Considering the struggles that Alex has had the past couple of starts, do you have a quicker hook for him on Saturday or does his equity, so to speak, from his two months before that make you not necessarily take him out so early?

DAVID ESQUER: That's a good question. Typically in a three-game series, your Friday starter goes out there and let's say he's not his best, there's a lot of times he'll throw 100 pitches no matter how many runs he gives up, because you've got to set the table for next two days.

I think we're going to watch Alex see if he looks like he's himself or not. I don't think we can afford in a double-elimination tournament to ride someone out just to utilize his pitches. You don't want to get too far down.

And obviously if at the looks like himself, looks like he can battle and keep the game close and give our offense a chance to stay in the game and win the game -- but I think we'll know early on whether, the hitter will tell us whether he's closer to how he was virtually 90 percent of the season or is he still struggling with location and command.

Q. This is Dave Van Horn's third appearance here in the last, I think, four College World Series. You scouted him twice this year. Are there any hallmarks of a Dave Van Horn team that maybe stand out to you?

DAVID ESQUER: They're usually physical on the mound. They've got great arm strength, typically. And he's willing to play a diverse brand of baseball. He'll safety squeeze and suicide squeeze and score some runs. They're usually very athletic.

And many years they hit the long ball, too. They've got enough power to hit a bunch of home runs. And in the SEC, in Baum Stadium, it's conducive to some power as well.

I think it's kind of a typical Dave Van Horn team. I know maybe their numbers didn't start off like they would want, just like ours didn't. But I think in the last six weeks or so they've played pretty typical Arkansas baseball.

Q. You brought up your blast from the past. '85, you played Arkansas here. Dave was a graduate assistant on that team?

DAVID ESQUER: They sent us home that World Series.

Q. What was your recall of way back then?

DAVID ESQUER: I remember the names, Norm DeBriyn was the head coach. I remember they had a good player

named Ellis Roby. I think Jeff King was on that team. They had some players.

And then we played Arkansas the next year at Oklahoma State in the Regionals. Jeff King was the No. 1 pick in the draft.

Arkansas has been around for years during my career at Stanford. And a quality team. Coach Van Horn, with what he's done with that team, has been great.

They actually came out and played us when I was at Cal at a tournament out there. He's always been just a class individual and always loved talking baseball with him, highest respect with him, the great things he's done at Nebraska and Arkansas.

It's no surprise to see his team here, regardless what the regular season or finish may have looked like in the SEC. When it becomes tournament time, his teams have played well and well often.

Q. Same question about Jacob Palisch. What's the relationship? How have you seen him develop? And how was he in your program, and is it special to get to see him here in Omaha with you all?

DAVID ESQUER: He closed out. He sent us to Omaha last year against -- or, I'm sorry he sent us to Super Regionals. He closed out the Regional against Irvine.

Jake and I have always had a great relationship. He used to stand by me in the dugout. I kind of counted on him. He would be there on my left. Wasn't afraid to chase foul balls and sit there, encourage his team.

He pitched great for us. And I texted him -- I've texted him throughout the season just encouraging him when I see him do something well. I'm kind of the corny guy that takes a bunch of selfies, I texted him, I'm hoping to take a selfie at Omaha with you this year, just like we did last year.

He said, Looking forward. They were in before we were. So I had to do the work to make sure that could happen.

Q. The fact that you guys are the only West Coast school here; you've got four SEC teams, bunch of schools from the south, does that give you a little more motivation, a little more chip on the shoulder coming into the College World Series?

DAVID ESQUER: We're aware of that. We're trying to uphold the pride of West Coast baseball. We take a lot of pride in that, the brand of baseball that's out west, and we all know the Power Five conferences are all capable and

good.

I know Oregon State was just a minute away, just an inch away from getting in themselves and lost to a really good Auburn team.

So all year long I think I had said, it was clear-cut that Tennessee looked like they were the clear-cut best team in the country.

But I always felt like, below them, everyone else had a chance. There was no real clear-cut 2 or 3. And we're ranked second in the country.

But I felt like 2 and 19 were just the same. It depends on who is going to play a good brand of baseball that weekend. I think it's a free fall this weekend. I don't think there could be any favorite. I think every team here is as capable as you could have an 18-field.

So some people say, are you the favorite because you're the highest ranked? I don't think that's the case. I think all eight teams are looking to play their best brand of baseball, have a good game that day and see who can come out and win.

Q. I saw you nodding your head when Alex was talking about Quinn's move to the closer role. How has he embraced that? He said he didn't really like it at the beginning. What do you expect from Alex? What's his mix going to be against the Razorbacks?

DAVID ESQUER: The most important move we made the whole season probably was Quinn Mathews going to the bullpen. And to say that we did it right, immediately, we didn't.

It was a little bit how do we do it correctly; do you just give him a one-run lead in the ninth and let him have that game, when typically the closer probably gets the most important out in the seventh, maybe have to run eighth and ninth inning, too, if you need them.

We didn't do that. And we had two weekends that were probably definitive. We got swept at Arizona, which we had the lead in the eighth inning all three games.

We didn't hand the ball off to someone who could finish those games for us. We then went to Washington and we were still struggling on do you just give Quinn a one-run lead in the ninth and let him win that game? The biggest at-bat was in the eighth inning tie game in the eighth. We went with someone else and they scored and ended up beating us in that game.

The next decision we had to make, if Quinn hasn't pitched, do we start him on Sunday, which we've done. And it became kind of apparent, like, I don't think we can start him because, again, we're not getting stronger as the game goes on.

In our infinite wisdom we start him on Sunday, and, great, we had a 7-3 lead going into the seventh. He's done. Run into his pitch count. We end up losing the game 10-9. So at the end of that weekend we made the decision he's not going to start and we're going to use him as we would any closer, which would be from the seventh inning on, he would have the most important outs and maybe run the last couple of innings.

Once we made that switch, it stabilized our ability to win games at the end of the game. So that was probably the most important move we made. He accepted it. He understood early on because it was that kind of hybrid role that maybe we would close him and then still start him, it became kind of confusing to him what we were actually doing.

It became -- right after that weekend we said this is the definition we'll use you to win games. You're going to be our closer because that helps the team the best. And he said, hey, Coach, I get it. It was a little bit confusing early when I would pitch. But now that you've defined it for me, if that's what we need, I'm going to do it.

And Alex, again, you're going to know it's going to be his location, his ability to mix pitches. It's going to be whether he can stay one step ahead of the hitter. It's not "in your face" power stuff typically. Early in the season I think he probably was a 93, maybe a touch of 94.

In June and July you're probably not living there. So it's probably going to be 91, 92, and it's going to have to be impeccable command and command of all three pitches. And you're going to know if he can break down the hitter that will be the sign he's the Alex of old.

If he doesn't have a pitch to get them out and they can foul off five or six pitches, that makes the day tough.

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