

2022 College World Series

Thursday, June 16, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Arkansas Razorbacks

Coach Dave Van Horn

Cayden Wallace

Connor Noland

Michael Turner

Press Conference



CONNOR NOLAND: You can say whatever you want. I think everybody should be confident in themselves. I've got the same confidence with my guys, the batters and our fielders. So I guess we'll find out.

Q. You guys know you're facing Alex Williams tomorrow, getting after that, and they've got a great bullpen. Is this a one-pitch-at-a-time approach? How do you attack that kind of pitching that you're going to see?

MICHAEL TURNER: One pitch at a time. We know the challenge we've got into and we're just excited to be here. Coach has been saying it for a while now -- it's about us. We're focussed on us and putting together a strong game.

CAYDEN WALLACE: Like he said, it's one pitch at a time. We're not looking past anything else. Just focussed on the first game, and go out there and do our thing.

Q. Looking back from fall ball to sitting up here on the dais, what have you learned about your team, your teammates, the style of Arkansas baseball for this spring and into this summer, and reflect on the growth and challenges that you had? And congratulations for being here and best of luck.

CONNOR NOLAND: I think I knew we were tough the whole year. Just sometimes you have to wait for an opportunity to prove it. And I think that the last two weeks have given us an opportunity to prove it. And I've seen it here and there again. But it's really staying true this past two weeks, three weeks. Team's really come together. And we're playing a brand of baseball that Arkansas should be proud of.

MICHAEL TURNER: Completely agree. We were saying all fall how good we thought this team was going to be. And I think we're starting to live up to that expectation a little bit. I think these past two or three weeks have been a good clicking time period for the team. I feel we're clicking on all cylinders. It's a good time to do that.

CAYDEN WALLACE: Absolutely, I agree with both, what

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by coach Dave Van Horn and student-athletes Connor Noland, Michael Turner and Cayden Wallace.

DAVE VAN HORN: Obviously just great to be back. This place, I've said it 20 times the last week, it never gets old. It's hard to get here. It's special.

These guys right here, their teammates, they did a great job the last couple of weekends of playing about as hard as I've seen them play all year.

And went into a couple of difficult places and came away victorious. Now get to be up here. So it's great.

Q. Connor, you guys played Stanford. I'm assuming that you're going to be the starter in game one. What do you know about their lineup? Is it a benefit you've played them before?

CONNOR NOLAND: I think so. We obviously played them earlier in the year. Hagen Smith threw that game, so I got to sit back and watch, take everything in. Got a sneak peek at their lineup, have a good idea what they do.

Q. What is it that they do?

CONNOR NOLAND: They swing it well. I think everybody has seen that the past couple of weeks. They're a good team, solid from 1 to 9, and well-rounded throughout that lineup. It's a good challenge for us.

Q. Connor, Alex Williams from Stanford made a comment in the press conference that's going a little bit crazy on social media that he thinks their offense is better than yours. I saw you "like" a few tweets to that. How do you feel about that statement?



they said. And ever since we stepped back on campus last fall, we knew there was something special with this team.

It just kind of like -- the season went by very fast, and we just kind of have proven how tough we are. And we've worked hard to be that tough. And we've got really good guys on this team that will go to war for any of us. And have a really good fan base and coaching staff. And it's time since we're here.

Q. Could you guys just talk about the gauntlet of running through the SEC and how that's prepared you for this? And also just the fact that half the field is SEC teams?

CONNOR NOLAND: I think this speaks volumes to it. There's four teams here from the SEC. The West is loaded. Every week you have to bring it. Obviously we played a lot of these teams before. It really gets you ready to jump into this kind of tournament where you might face those teams again. I think we're ready and have a good sneak peek of what we have to do.

MICHAEL TURNER: I agree. The SEC is a very special league. I'm glad I got to be a part of it for my last year. We got to experience some great competition all year and I think it definitely prepared us for what we're about to see here.

CAYDEN WALLACE: Coming in last year out of high school, I knew the SEC was a special league, and it kind of proved itself the past two years -- showing that there's four teams in it this year and we've played them, obviously. We're excited to go out there, bring our best every day and focus on one game at a time.

Q. How much of a motivation did the way last season end serve for the group? And what's it mean to be back on this stage?

CONNOR NOLAND: It meant a lot to get back to this. Obviously we had the downfall last year that happened and we were sad about it. But it motivated us this year. We worked for it. I think Coach talked about it all year, we've got to do it for those guys that last year maybe didn't have the opportunity.

We have a lot of guys up here that haven't been to Omaha before, transfer guys. Some guys that have been there two years. To have that happen for them, I'm really excited for them. And I think we've got a lot to prove still.

MICHAEL TURNER: Yeah, I agree.

CONNOR NOLAND: About every other question.

MICHAEL TURNER: Yeah, I never thought I'd be here three years ago. I'm grateful to be here. Watching the other teams when we were celebrating on their field, you could just see the heart break. I'm sure they went through it last year. Grateful we're on the other end of that. Grateful to be here. It's hard to get here.

CAYDEN WALLACE: Last year, we obviously got to watch North Carolina State dog pile on our field. And you take it to heart. And you've got to forget it at some point.

We've got to get back out there like we did this year and worked. And we knew we wanted to be the one dog piling this year. Not just to get here, we wanted to be set ourselves up for the chance to win it. And that's what we're focused on now and that's how we use that motivation.

Q. You alluded to it a moment ago coming in as a transfer to this group that had been together. What was that acclimation process for you like to feel like you were fully a part of this program? And what does it mean to you have been such a big part of the puzzle to get this team here?

MICHAEL TURNER: It was nice. I came in in the fall. It was kind of a late deal where when I committed here I just hurried up and got a place to stay. But they welcomed me with open arms from the team to the nutritionist to everyone.

It was a super easy transition for me. And it's special to be a part of the team like this. It's my last year of college baseball, so I'm more than happy to go out at Omaha, for sure.

Q. Cayden, the standard that David set here for this program, I think maybe you guys expect to get to Omaha on a year-to-year basis. How did that play into your recruitment? I know you're an in-state kid. Could you talk about the reason you came, to be able play to this stage? And, Connor, you're already here, but the standard that David put up for this program.

CAYDEN WALLACE: We don't talk about it too much, about coming here. It's just an expectation. Being recruited here, you know this is the goal. You have a chance to come here every year. It's kind of like when you step on campus, you know that's what you're going to do.

And Coach Van Horn has done an unbelievable job at taking almost every group to the College World Series. And it's definitely just something, when you step on campus you know it's going to happen. And you've got to work for it and earn it and the team's got to be tough. But

that's just the kind of teams that he produces.

MICHAEL TURNER: Coach Van Horn is a really special guy. If you know college baseball, you know Arkansas is going to be right there at the end of the postseason every year making a run at the College World Series. A lot of credit to him and the coaching staff.

When I came in, we didn't talk about it much, it was kind of expected. I think that's a good standard to have -- don't talk about it, be about it. Lived by that my whole life. I think it was a good fit.

CONNOR NOLAND: I completely agree. I think the standard is the same every day. You walk in the door, everybody knows what it is. You don't have to really talk about it. And that's what we do.

We might have a new building there at the facility, but I think we're still a blue-collar group that gets in there every day and works. That's the thing that Coach Van Horn has set down and I think we've followed it well.

Q. You have been on the road since the last Alabama series. And I think maybe a certain bonding comes out of that. How much has that played in to you being here right now, bonding on the road?

CAYDEN WALLACE: Absolutely. I've always enjoyed playing on the road. It's just something, like, we kind of set last year -- play on the road, we're tough on the road.

And it's just definitely bonding time. We get to spend a lot of time on buses and going to eat together and practicing and working out together on the road. It's definitely something special. You get it at home, too, but you really get it on the road. I think it's definitely something that has brought our chemistry together towards the end of the year, too.

MICHAEL TURNER: I think camaraderie and chemistry is big, especially when you get towards the end of the season. We mentioned it before -- we're playing for each other now. We've been saying it for a while, it's all about us. We're just focused on the task ahead for sure.

CONNOR NOLAND: I think the same thing. You get to learn more about the guys, you get closer to everybody. You learn their back story more. As you get deep in the season everyone gelling pretty well.

We went and watched the new "Top Gun" movie, and that got us motivated to play on a big stage and get our minds right.

Q. You've had a lot of guys on this tournament alone just adjust to new roles, switching spots in the lineups, closing games, starting games. What have you thought about the way your team has been able to adjust to different roles on fly?

DAVE VAN HORN: We needed to make some adjustments. We struggled down the stretch on the mound a little bit. We were giving up big innings and big innings usually happen when you walk people, pitch behind in the count. That's what happened a lot.

And so we changed up a little bit where we didn't announce our three starters. We'd give you Friday's starter and then just see who we had left. We told the pitching staff that all hands on deck. Don't think you're starting tomorrow, you may be pitching today.

And it seemed to work a little bit. And then we've had a few guys step up for us. And position player-wise, it's pretty much the same guys, but it really changed the lineup going into the Regional.

Just took Wallace out of the leadoff spot, put him in the 3 hole. Put Webb, took him out of the middle lineup and put him up top. And a few other adjustments there. And it worked.

Q. The guys that kind of alluded to it earlier, but you guys were the top-seeded team last year. And though that this team doesn't have the Christian Franklin, Kevin Kopps and Patrick Wicklander, what testament does it show to your team you're able to get back to the College World Series and still find that winning formula this season?

DAVE VAN HORN: Those are three really good players. Kevin was unbelievable. He ended up winning the Golden Spikes award really from out of nowhere. And he spoiled us. So you don't replace that guy.

And Christian was incredible centerfielder. Played with a lot of fire. Played at the end of the season. He was sick. Fought through it a little bit. And Wicklander was a guy we didn't even start at the beginning of the year. We didn't know how to use him. We threw him out there when we were getting crushed in the game one of our first conference series by Alabama.

We got beat 16-1, first game in the SEC in 2001. We threw him out there and he settled it down. We were down 10-0 after two. We put him out there. Did a great job about the fourth, fifth inning. We started him against Mississippi State on Friday. He beat them. He never went off Friday night, made all-conference.

That's baseball. Crazy things happens. You just gotta give guys opportunities. Losing those three guys, we lost three guys that were really tough and team oriented. We had a lot of guys kind of step it up. And you can't replace Kevin Kopps with one pitcher. Three or four guys have to take his job, because that's what he did. He did it all -- close, long relief, started at the end. Outfield has been solid.

I don't know, I just feel like we came together as a team. Played really well. We had a good team all year, but we weren't lights out. We didn't get whipped by, didn't get beat by very many, didn't beat you by very many. We just won enough.

Got a little tired in May. Our arms got tired and we lost some games down the stretch. But I just think the team had a burning desire to win. And after a lot of conversations and talks, really, the last few weeks, I think some guys, they came to realize that this may be their last shot to play with this group and, man, they've pulled together.

Q. Obviously you're no stranger to this stage. Personally what's it mean to be back? But with this group, what's special about them that they've been able to overcome everything this season?

DAVE VAN HORN: Well, it's really special to be back here. Especially the way it ended last year. Really had a perfect season going. It was unbelievable. Won everything that was put in front of us. Won every series on the weekend. And then to lose those last two games by one run, both days, it was tough.

So it made this year, it was special, because kind of hurt from last year, honestly. This group is special because they didn't want to be known as the team after the team that didn't do a whole lot and faded at the end of the year.

I don't know. Just a lot of different personalities that came together. And when we got back from that trip from Alabama, we were gone for two weeks, a lot of times a coach can look at a team and look at the way they walk around, body language, you're going we're in trouble.

And we didn't let that happen. They didn't let it happen. And to me that makes them special.

Q. I believe y'all were one of the teams in contention at the end for Jack Moss. What was it about his game that attracted y'all to him?

DAVE VAN HORN: We knew he was a good hitter. Honestly didn't know he was as good as he is. I don't think

Jim knew he was as good as he is. He's a professional type hitter. He swings at strikes. Fouls off borderline pitches. He uses the whole field. He's got some pull power. He can go the other way. He's just a really good hitter, and hats off to him for being a student of the game and working.

And yeah, that was a bummer when we didn't get him.

Q. You mentioned your team's all-hands-on-deck pitching approach. Stanford has certainly used that the past two weekends. I'm going to assume that Coach Esquer probably will do so again in Omaha. How does that change, if any, your offensive philosophy, particularly early in the game?

DAVE VAN HORN: It's not going to change us what we do. If you're worried about who they bring out of the bullpen, probably not doing very well.

We just have to do what we do and hopefully we'll have good at-bats, face a really good pitcher. 9-1 record, something like that. He knows how to win. Team plays good behind him.

We know all about the bullpen. The lefties and power arms that they have. So at this time of the year anything can happen. You've just got to have good at-bats. Try to take good swings and hopefully good things happen.

Q. Based on your earlier comments, I'm assuming you're not going to announce any starters beyond Connor?

DAVE VAN HORN: Connor will definitely be our starter on Saturday.

Q. Is it a good problem that Zack Morris is just recently -- Zack Morris recently started and Hagen closed, and you can mix and match, is that a good thing, you like it?

DAVE VAN HORN: We love it. It's a great thing. There's no problem there. And all those guys, they just want to pitch. And they don't care if they start or not.

Honestly, we didn't know who we were going to throw in game two in North Carolina until the morning of the game. And we changed our mind twice the night before. We were going to go left. Then we thought, let's just go right. We went back to left. No, let's go with the guy that we've given it to him a little bit more and given him the ball a little more.

Having the different arms, different looks, out of the pen, and they can go long. If we need to bring somebody in the

fourth he might be able to finish the game. It's all good.

Q. Seven appearances here in 19 years. It speaks for itself. How much is winning this thing maybe still drive you to win it?

DAVE VAN HORN: I don't think that's what drives me. I mean, shoot, yeah, I want to win it, so does everybody that has sat up here today. Whether they won it two times or never, you want to win it -- for the fan base, you want to win it for the former players, former coach, coaches. You'd love to see your team dog pile on the field.

I don't want the players to feel it's a failure if you don't win it. It's unbelievable how tough it is to get here. I've lived it many a time. I've been on other end of it. The heartbreak, maybe three times, that's what's hard to swallow.

Winning it would be great. I want to win it. I've wanted to win it since I started coaching. Who wouldn't? You get in it to win that last game of the year maybe when you start out. But the longer you coach, the more you just appreciate the players. And that's where I'm at now.

Q. You mentioned all the roles evolving on your pitching staff and changing up your order. Is it a little unique it's happened so late in the season, or is this kind of something you've done in your past?

DAVE VAN HORN: No, I don't think I've really done this before. I mean, you guys, you see every game we play. We had to do something. And we had to make a change. And I'm sure if it wouldn't have worked, at least we said we tried. I'd hate to look back and say we should have done this or done that.

But what I appreciate is the way that all the pitchers and the players have accepted it and said, yeah, we need to try this. And we tried it; it worked. Did it again, it worked. Flipped another guy in there and we started winning again.

Q. I just wondered, we talked a lot about how you faced Stanford before. I'm curious how different you feel like this team is from how it was in February, when you played Stanford?

DAVE VAN HORN: First off, Stanford's really good. Very physical. Coach Esquer does a great job. I have so much respect for him. When we played them in February, they were better than us. They proved it on the field. They shut us out 5-0. It was about 35 degrees. It was brutal. That was their second game of the day. And that was our first.

I thought they outplayed us and out-toughed us. How are we a different team? We've got a bunch of games under

our belt. We made a lot of changes. We feel like we're a better team than we were in February.

I feel like we're a better team than we were in April. So I don't know. We're throwing more strikes now. We seem to be putting together better at-bats, being a little tougher outs.

I would say that defense has been solid all year. So that you throw strikes, field the ball, good at-bats, you have a chance to win.

Q. Scouting you've done on Alex Williams. What can you say about his repertoire and what you expect from him, and Connor, his last two starts have been different?

DAVE VAN HORN: Williams, he can just pitch. He's not going to blow you away, but he's got really good off-speed stuff, really good change-up. I'm sure his team loves playing behind him. Fills up the zone.

You win nine games for a guy against one loss, that's a lot of decisions. They play in a great league with great players. A lot of times you don't have that many decisions. You come out of the game, it's tied or whatever the case may be.

As far as Connor, I mean, I just feel like that he got a little tired. He got a second wind. And hopefully the wind keeps blowing. The guy's pitching good. But if he gives us five, that's great. Seven. If he gives us three, we'll go to the pen. But we wouldn't be here without Connor and the year he's had.

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