

2022 College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Auburn Tigers

Coach Butch Thompson

Blake Burkhalter

Kason Howell

Trace Bright

Postgame Press Conference



I was tired of watching us sitting there having at-bat so we did some goofy stuff. Bunted a ball too hard for the first out. We did a first-and-third, and we delayed too much from leaving at third. And it made me happy. It was goofy baseball, but we scored four runs the next inning and it seems like we got each other's attention.

I was watching Oklahoma last night and they made the first and third out at third base, and everyone is throwing trash at them. I'm like, they're right where they need to be. They're playing, attacking and they're going for it. And I thought that helped us work in creating the sixth inning.

And Foster had a big hit for us and has been struggling just health wise to stay on the field and was a big, big hit for us. But thankful to get a win and look forward to competing again tomorrow.

Q. Trace, what do you think were the key adjustments you were able to make after that second, third inning to find your groove get deep into the ball game?

TRACE BRIGHT: Location, that was the biggest thing. They were aggressive. Being able to flip it off-speed in there behind in the count was huge for me. We knew they were aggressive going in.

They jumped on some first pitches and made me pay for it. But I think I got my command later in the first a little bit and then better in the third, more so. So that was the biggest thing for me.

Q. You all have seen three Pac-12 teams home at this postseason throughout the Regional, Super Regional and here in Omaha. How does that feel to represent your conference this well and to play baseball against one of the top conferences and beat them?

KASON HOWELL: Anytime we can play good teams, we want to represent the SEC well. Obviously all Pac-12 teams we played, I respect them. They have really good players. But being from the Southeastern Conference, having four Western Division teams in here, we just want to play good baseball and try to represent our conference

Auburn - 6, Stanford - 2

BUTCH THOMPSON: Exciting to get a win for us here in Omaha for our program. These three men were, sitting next to me were major contributors in the ballgame for sure. The beginning and the end with the pitching, I thought, was really good. Trace Bright, I think I gained more respect for him today than ever. I thought he was one hitter away -- I don't know if he knows that -- one hitter away of coming out in the third inning, but he weathered the storm.

We really were scouting report interested in can your fastball survive, and the first two runs come off of breaking balls that I can't see from the side, but maybe grabbed a little more play, or not our best breaking balls, how they got their first two runs.

One barely hit the chalk down the third base line and he held it together. He came out with his fastball in the third inning and got us all the way through the left. Left a runner at third to finish his outing.

And Sheehan gave us an inning -- I'm a pitching guy, so I always think how important that is. And with two outs in the seventh and they're at their 3 hole, my job is to get Burky in the game. Got out of that and we were able to get the 4, 5, 6, cuz he needed to be pitching against them there in the eighth. And we were able to get through the ninth inning there.

And then my favorite offensive inning was the fifth inning. I think Brody got a ground ball to the 6 hole. We finally got to a hit-and-run approach. Scrapping our at-bats. We had five 3-2 counts and we lost them. I know we had an eight-pitch at-bat by Rambusch to start the game, and the full counts we couldn't win.



well.

And obviously it feels good to win against such great teams like Stanford and Oregon State and UCLA -- all have great programs, all have great players. We're just trying to represent the conference well.

Q. What kind of effect has Tim Hudson had on the pitching staff?

BLAKE BURKHALTER: He's been awesome. He actually helped me pick up my cutter. He will work with anybody if you ask him. He's always looking to help. And after every inning I come in the dugout and I'll go over there and talk to him.

First thing, he'll be like ask what's working, what's not working. And then right before I go out I'm like, what do you think I should do with these guys. Who do I have coming up? How should I pitch to these guys? How do I work around them? Any places I need to be worried about? And with a mind like that in the dugout, you've got to take advantage of it.

TRACE BRIGHT: I would say with that ton of experience there's ton of knowledge. Trying to pick his brain all the time at practice, even if you're not pitching about how he sees things, that's big for me. I try to get little tidbits of information that may help me that I can apply to my game.

Q. Trace, you hear your coach, ups and downs of this game with your backs up against the wall. When you saw Cole make that play what was going through your head at that moment?

TRACE BRIGHT: He's been great all year. Big swing today for us. He was fighting the heat, which was amazing for him to finish that game all nine innings was big for him.

But I know that the offense was about to heat up at some point and I know they had our back. And Tommy and Burky coming in after me, I knew they had the game right where they wanted it and in their hands. I was happy with them finishing the game.

Q. Blake, I know Butch had talked about it a little earlier in the season, getting you back to top form since that injury during the Tennessee series. You've looked probably as best you have all year from Supers until now. Was there a point recently where you felt like you've gotten to that top form? And just I guess what's been working best for you since the Supers?

BLAKE BURKHALTER: Honestly, it's all starting to click at the right time. I can't really like put a finger on where like

what exactly what part of my game is getting better. But I know like my focus when I came come in the game I'm there first through nine innings ready to go. Just the mental aspect, that's been locked since postseason play has come around. And everything is starting to click on the mound.

Q. Kason, you touched on Cole's swing, but how big is it for an offense to have one of those breakthrough swings in a game like this, especially the way you guys have all been this last couple of games swinging the bat.

KASON HOWELL: Like Coach said, we lost a lot of 3-2 counts. We were battling and obviously offensively we haven't been where we want to be the last two, three games. But for Cole to really put a spark in our offense -- I mean you could tell just everyone's at-bats were just kind of -- we were a little more on the attack after Cole's big swing.

I hope that can carry momentum into this week and into tomorrow when we compete against whoever we're playing. But that swing meant a lot and Cole came up in a big moment. And he's been huge for us all year but that really put a spark in our offense today.

Q. Trace, what does it mean for you to get the start today, considering you had such a rough outing out in Corvallis? And I guess you gotta feel great about the way you pitched.

TRACE BRIGHT: You want to bounce back. That was a tough outing for me. But I endured that whole game. My offense had my back that first game and we pulled it out. But you try and learn from it and move on.

But I wanted to get us off on the right foot had us behind the 8-ball for a few innings. But like Kason said, once the offense got rolling I knew we were in a good place with the bullpen set up and how we were with that lead.

Q. On the broadcast we all saw that little bird in the dugout. Can you guys tell us what happened there and when you guys first saw it?

TRACE BRIGHT: They were playing, I was over there, front-row seat, somehow it managed to find its way in our dugout. Maybe a little rally bird or something. But it seemed to work for us.

Q. Blake, can you just talk about that first batter you faced in the seventh inning coming in with the bases loaded like that?

BLAKE BURKHALTER: When I was coming in, you try to, I mean you know the bases are loaded but you have to flush it. Your main focus is that first guy out of the pen. That's what we focus on as a bullpen, and coming in there and being able to command some pitches.

I don't think I had my fastball command all day, but the cutter was working and the change-up was working and that's what I had to lean on. I got, what, I think it was a 3-2 count. I was right on the brink of walking him, but thankfully I had that strikeout and got us off the field.

Q. When you hear your players say you were kind of explaining that you had to get creative in the fifth and the sixth, they went on attack mode, is that what you need to hear come Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday now?

BUTCH THOMPSON: We're just at a stage. I think we traveled a bunch, 5,000 miles. Quick turnaround for us. And I just wanted to get our feet back underneath us. But more importantly, if you leave here -- my job is to keep a group of players and coaches to leave with no regrets. Just let it hang out.

What are we going to do, screw something up or make a mistake? I want them to attack as much as they can. Dan Gable, I said "attack" three times. He wouldn't say it once. Dan Gable would go attack, attack, attack. And I want them to go out that way.

And it's not always going to be perfect. But I just don't want to sit there for nine innings and just have at-bats. So that's why I'm trying to make a deal out of that. I kind of asked for it. So anything that looks dumb it's always my fault anyway, so I might as well call it out and get them stirred up a little bit. And I think the fifth inning led to a chance in the sixth.

Q. How big is it after 2019 getting that win and not going home to a barbecue like you said, and how big is that momentum going to carry over into the next game?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I don't know what carries over to the next game. But absolutely our program winning a game here is not just getting here but winning a game against an amazing team. Dave, who I think about Marquess all those years growing up. What an amazing program. Just a chance to compete against them.

I've embraced every one of these teams I've got to play because I respect the game. I care about the game so much. It even gets me in trouble sometimes, but I care about our sport and I think it's at one of the best places it's

ever been.

Just an opportunity to get to compete against that program is a box that I get to check personally, but our team is another sense of accomplishment for our program.

So it's not just a win. It's important for us as we continue to try to build ours and build a brand of respectability, sincere respectability with our program. So it is a big deal and it gives us a chance to compete again.

I don't know. Our word today was "surrender." And I'm sitting in my hotel last night and I'm, like, all right, they're telling me only four teams out of the last 40 years have lost that first game and won the national championship. Who is it? And then I looked and I was, like, okay, Pat Casey did it in '06 and '18, and Tanner did it in '10. How about I call them tonight since I'm sitting here?

Both of those men got back and both gave me paragraphs of taking me through the journey with their team. Like I say, the man or woman or the team that will never quit, they've got a chance. And I just want us to fight and I want us to attack. And that's all you can ask for.

The score will take care of itself. But those men, it was like they were excited to hear from me and they're like yeah, this is what we did. This is what we talked about. This became our focus. And I'm just hunting for every inch we can for our program. Thankful for today and excited about tomorrow.

Q. In the sixth inning you got one guy who takes a foul off his shin. And looks pretty painful. He stays in there. You've got a guy, by all accounts, looks like he feels really lousy gets a big hit. Can you just talk about the sheer grit that was on display in that inning? And how bad does he feel?

BUTCH THOMPSON: He didn't feel great. Shouldn't he be in here? He got three RBIs and two hits; he should be in here right now. You can imagine he's probably getting IVs, that's what I was told, because he should be sitting here at the table visiting with us right now.

He's doing all he can. He barely pulled into second and dropped his head -- one of the biggest hits of his life trying to keep his head up. He's just done an amazing job.

I think back to game one now. People pile on people when you don't swing it offensively. Just the team looks lethargic when you're not getting hits sometimes. But I have little Bello trying to run through the left-field wall, he's trying to fight with a fan, he's diving on the line.

I got Brody, took a bite out of the tarp. From coaching, I always want to be level two, not on my couch at level one. I know they're fighting for us. Sometimes it just doesn't always look as pretty or clean, or the execution, because that's what this is all down to.

Whenever you have success here or you're playing somebody that's the best of the best of the best, every one of these teams had to climb a mountain. Everybody's hot enough. Everybody's good enough. But these guys are giving all they got. And I love my team.

Q. I just wanted to ask about you guys really roughed up their best pitcher who has been dominant for them all year. And I know you've only got so much time to game plan, but I was curious how much of the game planning went into going up against Quinn Mathews, and the success in that frame, was wondering if it was a blend of the bats finally breaking through or you guys maybe having a plan for going up against him?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I think we finally just exhaled. It's really neat how the players, their perspective, when Cole hit the ball, that was a big exhale for our offense. But like I say, that fifth inning just started up trying to do a little bit. I think that just got us wanting to go a little bit. And we knew we'd see him. We've been watching video of him. That's their guy.

Thankfully he got in there that early. It's hot out there. And I looked up at the board one time, he's at 56 pitches and he's an amazing pitcher. Then they brought in a lefty there to finish the game. It was 95. That was pretty good too.

So all in all we knew if we had any chance of winning today we'd have to deal with him. And I thought we did a pretty good job.

We brought Burkhalter into the seventh there. I really -- c'mon, Sheehan, we've got two outs and nobody on. We got a hit that we just defensive-replaced there, and that was the one place at the park where the ball was traveling was the left-center field. And we took a little flat route and you couldn't catch up on it late. We hit a batter and another single sharply.

So, like I said, when you're right at that part of lineup, we had to go dump our guy in. But we got Burkhalter in there later. And he had a lead.

But Mathews is a really good player. We really didn't know what kind of starting pitcher we would get. I think they moved around a little bit with their 2-hole guys. We tried to take the two or three best guys and started preparing them for that. And Mathews was absolutely one we watched a

lot of video and tried to talk about what we had to do against them.

Q. You're a pitching guy at heart. To see an outing like that, not only from Trace, but to have a pitching outing in that big of a moment?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I looked at it. We struck out 13 the other night. Struck out 16 batters today. I had no idea. And Trace, they hit him. He made a couple of breaking balls, but he just, he steadied himself and went to another level in the third.

It's a developmental piece where I'm proud of him. At the end of the day he was going to make Stanford beat him and he finally settled in the ball game. He had eight strikeouts and no walks. Burky had five strikeouts and no walks.

He got hit in the butt with a line drive there, but he's only walked seven guys. He does have the ability, whatever you think the skill level is of Burkhalter, he can at least shove it in the strike zone.

When you can do that the tenets of the baseball game usually work out. We get out of there with one walk and one hit batter against an offensive club. That gave us a chance.

When I was tipping my hat the best I could to Ole Miss the other night, no walks, they just did not help our offense any. We got a little more help today, and then we had a couple of big hits -- Foster, and really they handled -- I thought they pitched Sonny tremendous.

They would go up in the zone, off the plate. He had a really good at-bat, a fly ball to right. Not much happening to right today. And Peirce and Foster had a couple of big hits for us today.

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