

2022 College World Series

Wednesday, June 22, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Skip Johnson

David Sandlin

Jimmy Crooks

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma - 5, Texas A&M - 1

THE MODERATOR: Skip, congratulations on the win. Give us an overview.

SKIP JOHNSON: I thought Sandlin set the tone early executing one pitch at a time. That's what we talked about. We practiced it, actually, the other day in the shadowing, and Jimmy getting a big hit, separating the game. When you get to separate in the game early, you tend -- your breaking ball gets better, your fastball command gets better, getting a lead early.

Then it's just about establishing a strike zone and throwing strike one and going pitch to pitch. Really proud of our club. Hats off to Texas A&M. Had a really good team. To navigate through that lineup was really hard at times, and just really proud of our baseball team and what we've done.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go to the student-athletes. Questions?

Q. David, how much emphasis was put on getting -- or how much emphasis was getting first pitch strikes against these Aggies hitters that are notorious for taking pitches, and how does that set you up for success?

DAVID SANDLIN: It's important against anybody you play to get first pitch strike. That's the goal every time as a pitcher, so just going out there and throwing. That was the goal the whole time.

Q. David, a question about your readiness for this moment. Career high strike-outs. You came in in relief the other day. Did that prepare you in any way against this team to see any of the -- whether it's the environment or the hitters or whatever?

DAVID SANDLIN: Absolutely. Just got me ready for the atmosphere I was going to be in and mentally prepare almost more for this game and trust everything I had. I think I tried a little too hard, and as Coach Johnson says, you can't do that. You don't want to get geared up when I don't need to be.

Q. Jimmy, from your perspective, what did you see out of David today, and maybe that was different from the last time out here a few days ago? What was the game plan specifically against this A&M offense?

JIMMY CROOKS: Like Skip and David preach, throwing the first strike was the key with them. That's with every pitcher. The difference with him, he is not used to coming out of the pen, which some pitchers aren't, but he turned it around.

Today he was just a bulldog on the mound. He just threw first pitch strike, get after it, get ahead, and then just kept rolling.

Q. David, just as far as getting out of the top of the fourth, two on, no out, come back and strike out the side, how much did that just push you through the rest of the back half of the game?

DAVID SANDLIN: I mean, it helped for sure. I was just focused on just one out at a time executing spots. Whatever Jimmy called, I just wanted to execute it to the best of my ability. No matter if there was runners on, bases loaded, no outs, two outs, whatever happened, I just wanted to execute what he called.

Q. Jimmy, take me back to that first inning. How important was that to get you guys going there?

JIMMY CROOKS: It's really important for us to score first. That's the whole game. You just have to score more than the other team.

Yeah, no, our approach is just to be aggressive and just do our thing. And, you know, I don't know if Spike got on first, I don't know, but getting base runners on and our base



running to be aggressive is important, and then just hitting it in the gaps is what we try to do is and just stick with our approach and see what happens.

Q. David, how did you feel today? 12 strike-outs, 7 innings, relentless innings pitched. You got ahead of a lot of counts today through their heart of the order. How did you just feel on the mound overall today?

DAVID SANDLIN: I mean, I felt pretty good. I just trusted my preparation. Like I've been working towards it all year, and I feel like today was more muscle memory than anything up there on the mound. Just going out there and he just executing, don't think about things too much.

Q. Just for both guys, just can you just walk through the emotions and the feeling when Trevin gets that last out, and you know you have punched your ticket to be one of the final two teams playing this weekend?

THE MODERATOR: David, you start.

DAVID SANDLIN: It still feels kind of surreal. I don't know about for Jimmy. I mean, we'll feel it come Saturday. We'll be ready for Saturday.

JIMMY CROOKS: Trevin, he is awesome. He knows he is going to have the spotlight on him at the end, but any guy in the pen is going to have a role, and they're going to do their thing, but when Trevin comes out there, we have all the confidence in the world that he is going to just throw strikes, and then get us out of that inning and hopefully just finish it.

Then going into the championship series or whatever, I think we're just going to just stay calm and relaxed and just play our game.

Q. Jimmy, in the fourth inning you went out and talked to David, and I think the next pitch was a base hit, but then after that I think David retired 12 of the next 13 guys. Curious what was that mound visit about?

JIMMY CROOKS: Just telling him to be relaxed. I don't really tell David much. Not with any other pitchers. I just tell them to relax, do their thing, and just pound the zone.

After getting that hit, I knew he was in the zone. That's what got his going, and then he struck out the next three batters.

Q. Jimmy and David, if you could both just talk about yesterday. You guys made a trip over to old Rosenblatt. I know it's pretty much gone, but got to see some of the remnants. What did that mean for you

guys to get to make that trip and now to join other Sooner teams that have made the finals? What is sort of the significance of that for you guys?

DAVID SANDLIN: As Coach Johnson said to us, it's a part of us. The history and everybody that's played at the University of Oklahoma before us is just as important as the team we have now. They laid the groundwork for us, and we just need to keep going.

JIMMY CROOKS: He hit it on the nail, so ...

Q. This question is for David. Just coming into this game, you got three early strike-outs in the first inning, and then you got one to end the second. It looked like you were pretty emotional after that punch-out. How much did that kind of fuel you for the rest of the game?

DAVID SANDLIN: I just, yeah, tried to build off of everything that was going on in the game. I like to play with emotions. I know sometimes that's not the best thing to do, but that's who I've been and who I always will be.

It just goes back to the execution, like we've said. As long as I kept doing that, that's really what fueled me is to see everything working when Jimmy was calling it, so ...

THE MODERATOR: That looks like it will be it for you two until Saturday. Thank you. Now questions for Skip.

Q. Skip, just walk us through from your vantage point, what was working for David out there today?

SKIP JOHNSON: His fastball command and his slider and just trying to keep those guys off balance as much as you can.

Like he said, getting strike one was really huge for him. Then trying to locate a pitch after that. I thought his change-up was good late. At times he took some curve balls off the sliders that were really good as well.

Q. Can you talk about the value that Jimmy brings to this team, both obviously his bat and also just the reliable glove behind the plate and also massaging the pitchers through games all throughout this run?

SKIP JOHNSON: I think it's missed from the catching standpoint. The leadership that he provides, the comfort when he goes to the mound and either chews their butt out or gets them fired up or makes them execute pitches. I think that leadership from the catching standpoint is what is really needed.

We've had guys in the past -- I've had guys in the past that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

were really good at that, and we work really hard on that as a staff to teach that. Coach Overcash works with the catchers and does a great job of teaching that leadership quality.

Those guys know that Jimmy cares about them because they know he will put his body in front of you, he will play hurt. He is just a baseball player, and he is a prospect too.

Q. How crucial is it for you for David -- or for you and the team for David to pitch his way out of the fourth after giving up the back-to-back hits?

SKIP JOHNSON: I listened to whoever said about the fourth inning. I think he was really, really executing pitches in that inning.

I mean, you look at all the guys that are really good in pitching, and it's really the only thing you can control is throwing the ball to the target and executing the pitch. You can't control the outcome.

You might be able to think you can control the outcome, but if you are trying to make those guys swing and miss, they don't swing. I thought for him to focus like that in the middle of a game in that environment was a high elite level of focus and concentration and execution of pitches.

Q. Can you describe the importance of David's performance today as it relates to how your starting pitching sets up, avoids tomorrow, for instance? Then, obviously, keeps your bullpen fresh for the rest of the weekend.

SKIP JOHNSON: It's huge. Now Bennett can go on a full week's rest. They're used to doing that. Any time you get them off that, you kind of worry about it a little bit. We actually threw a bullpen for Bennett just in case he had to throw tomorrow just to stay ahead of the game.

Then Horton will have a full game's rest of going into his outing probably the second game. Then we'll just get a cowboy hat and pull names out of it after that and go from there.

Q. Skip, I wanted to ask you, there was no jubilant celebration after. It looked like they were still all business after they got the game's final out. How much does that impress you, and do you see the same signs as you have had from past teams that you have coached that reached this point?

SKIP JOHNSON: I think those kids are focused. I don't know if it's dog-piling or whatever it is. I mean, it's kind of weird sometimes. I don't tell them not to dog-pile, I can tell

you that.

I'm real emotional. It might not seem like I am. I'm just thanking Jesus for the moment really and all the people that are pulling for a bunch of guys named David. It happened to be David pitching today.

Q. I asked the guys about the trip to Rosenblatt. Can you give us a little insight on when you decided you wanted to do that and what that was like to see your guys on what's essentially baseball hallowed ground?

SKIP JOHNSON: For sure. That's why I have the best baseball operations guy in baseball, Ryan Gaines. He came to me before we went over to practice, and he goes, Man, I got a good idea. I asked him, What's that? He said, Let's go over to Rosenblatt. I said, That's cool. Let's go over there and show those guys where this place has been, what the College World Series is about, where the Oklahoma Sooners won the last national championship in 1994 on. It was really big.

Just explained to them when they got off the -- before they got off the bus, you know, this is what college baseball is about. I remember it was like an airport, balls leaving that yard. I got to play in 2009 in Rosenblatt, and it was really special. Didn't get to come back in 2010, but got to open up 2011 here. It's a great place.

Q. In that fourth inning, Coach, I know you talked a little bit about it already, but it looked like David's -- maybe his relief point, he was high on those curve balls, leaving them upstairs, and Jimmy went and talked to them. Just how impressive is it for him to kind of correct that and come back and strike all those guys out and kind of adjust and pitch the way he did the rest of the way?

SKIP JOHNSON: Well, you got in that situation, it's really not about mechanics. It's just about your mental side of executing the pitch one pitch at a time.

You don't want to talk about mechanics. It gets away from just executing the pitch, but that's the leadership Jimmy showed to execute the pitch one pitch at a time.

I mean, the level of focus what he did after that really him releasing the pitch and getting to the next pitch, it's 100% of what you got to get to the next pitch and control yourself. We talk about that a lot. I don't know if I've seen all year long an execution of what he did. I mean, it was pretty fun to watch.

Q. Just as far as how fitting is it that it's a guy named David that goes out and does what he does today, and

how special is this group, just to you personally?

SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, it's really special. A guy named David. That's really what kind of what started this deal. It started with the lines back the beginning of the year, and then it's transitioned to David and being just a bunch of Davids. I'm really proud of those guys.

They really have been selfless. Chazz is biting at the bullet to go down in the bullpen. You can see him getting ready for whatever inning it was. It was going into the seventh, and we had a list of guys that we could -- we were going to use him in that list. Then when he got to the eighth inning, I was going to go with Trevin because the match-ups were better for Trevin than it was for Chazz, and he hadn't thrown, and Chazz is one of our better arms.

We have to keep telling those guys, hey, finish. Finish. Keep looking at it. Keep working at it. Keep dreaming, doing all those little bitty things that get those guys out there on the mound.

THE MODERATOR: We'll have more questions for you at 11:00 on Friday. Thank you.

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