

2022 College World Series

Sunday, June 26, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Skip Johnson

Cade Horton

Postgame Press Conference



Ole Miss 4, Oklahoma 2

SKIP JOHNSON: Wow. We fought our butts off all day long, and Cade was outstanding. Take the momentum of the game in that one inning, kind of got taken away from us.

Just want to thank the coaches and the players more so than anything, and congratulate Ole Miss. They did a great job. Outstanding team.

I think that us losing the momentum in the game really cost us, and I wouldn't want anybody behind the plate other than Jimmy Crooks or Trevin to close the game. Cade was at the end of his rope, and he wanted to keep going, and I've got to look out for him and his future.

So I'm really proud of what he did and all the players all year long, overcome a lot of adversity and sticking to a common goal, which was to win the national championship.

That'll always be our goal.

Thank you.

Q. Cade, just as far as -- is it tough to look big picture right now, what you personally were able to accomplish this year coming back from Tommy John and the team getting to where you guys did?

CADE HORTON: What do you mean big picture?

Q. Losing the national championship, just being able to get here.

CADE HORTON: Yeah, obviously that was our goal coming into it. We made it here, and we accomplished a lot this year. But we'll be back. I know that because this team laid the foundation for the future of Oklahoma baseball.

Q. Obviously you pitched extremely well today. Can you walk us through what was working so well for you today and why you were so effective?

CADE HORTON: Yeah, I just stuck to what I've been doing the last few starts, and that was just taking it one pitch at a time. I just wanted to put my team in a position to win and get ahead and throw strikes.

Q. Cade, I saw after the game TJ McCants came over and Coach Lafferty came over to shake your hand. What did they say to you and what was it about?

CADE HORTON: They just told me good job, and they said I did a hell of a job. I have a lot of respect for those guys, and they did a great job.

Q. Cade, obviously not the end result you guys want, but reflect on your two starts and your time here in Omaha at this event.

CADE HORTON: You know, it's been wild. It's been fun. Hopefully next year I can get back -- we can get back here. That's the plan.

Q. As a Norman native, the only one on the team, what did it mean to you specifically to be able to have that name on your jersey out there today?

CADE HORTON: Yeah, it meant a lot. This is a dream come true for me, and I just wanted to represent the university as best I could.

Q. The inning where you guys took the lead, I know you guys stranded the bases loaded, but the next frame you struck out the side. Did it seem to you the crowd was pretty one-sided coming out there and getting those strikeouts? What was that like in that moment?

CADE HORTON: Yeah, I knew once we stranded the bases loaded, we needed to take the momentum back. I had that going through my head. So I just wanted to go out there and continue to make good pitches and execute.

Q. Cade, there was a lot of 2010 players, former OU players came to Omaha. I want to ask you to reflect on this locker room and the friendships you made and the journey you've had this year coming from how far you came.

CADE HORTON: Yeah, I mean, this team is second to none. I'll remember these guys for the rest of my life. It's a close-knit group in there. There's a lot of young guys, and then there's -- like Tanner, Trent, Jaret, Carmichael, Ben, all those guys that have been around for a while. It sucks seeing this as one of their last games in the uniform.

Q. Cade, you mentioned one pitch at a time; it probably is harder to do than the way you explained it, keeping your heart rate down, keeping your breathing down when you're out there and the tension of the game is mounting and the strikeouts are mounting. How did you do that? How did you keep yourself calm in the moment?

CADE HORTON: Just stick with my routines. Just make sure to take a deep breath every time before I deliver the pitch, and then if I didn't like the pitch or if, say, I got -- I thought it was a strike and it got called a ball, step off the mound and take a deep breath and lock back in.

Q. Cade, I know you guys have said that this was always the plan, to win a national championship, to play for a national championship, and yet to think how far you guys came from mid-season to now, to really get the results and the wins to get here, how do you reflect on that, and how do you explain how you guys turned such a hard corner to make the Championship Series?

CADE HORTON: Yeah, I mean, we've been doubted all year. We were picked to finish sixth in the Big 12.

I think looking back at the beginning of the year, we didn't know how to win yet, and that's something our team figured out, and we went through struggles with that, the series against Texas and Oklahoma State.

We kind of learned and got through that, learned how to win, started believing in each other, and it kind of just took off from there and set a good clear path for us.

Q. Just what was the interpretation of the ruling in the sixth inning on the interference? Was that just a straight interference?

SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, running the runners' lane, that's maybe what the call was, and they had to go back to the other bases because it kills it right there.

I think the biggest thing that I want to explain to that deal is the umpires are going to -- if we take out the human element of the umpires, this game is not ever going to be any good. If we continue to do those things and put a computer or whatever they want to do, it's going to continue to be good.

The rule says that you have to do it within 30 seconds and not be able to look at the video board. That's what the rule says. Maybe there's some discrepancies of it. But that's what I also love about the game is the human element. I have tons of respect for the umpires, going back to the regional tournament, never understood why they couldn't be out there with the National Anthem when everybody else is because it's very important to our country. I explained that to them, too.

That's the interpretation of the rule, they have a runner's lane there, and if we mess with the fabric of the game by getting computer umpires, I think I'll just go fishing.

Q. After the run got taken off the board, they came back with a solo home run. What does it mean to see your team come back and get those two runs in the seventh and respond on this stage?

SKIP JOHNSON: Well, I mean, they're going to fight. That's one thing that they've done all year long. They've fought and they've fought and they've fought and they've battled and battled. That's a part of their DNA, and that's a part of what the University of Oklahoma has taught them to do and our culture has taught them how to do. I'm really proud of those guys.

The funny thing is about baseball, it doesn't care how you feel. It doesn't. That's what's great about it, too.

That's the learning lesson in it, continue to fight and understand the details of the game and fight for what's right in the game and play as hard as you can because it respects you.

Q. Skip, Trevin Michael is someone who's been a rock for you the whole season, especially in the postseason. What was your message to him after the game today?

SKIP JOHNSON: That I loved him and I wouldn't want to have anybody else out there.

Q. In 2009 Coach Garrido went through a national runner-up season. You were on his bench. What did you learn from Coach during that 2009 season? And what did the players learn after getting so close, and



what do you expect of the team going forward?

SKIP JOHNSON: Well, our expectation is always to win a national championship. That's not ever going to dwell on -- as soon as we practice every day, that's what we're going to talk about.

What I learned from Coach Garrido is one pitch at a time and understanding what the moment does to -- the environment does to kids and to try to be in control of themselves one pitch at a time because really that's what the game demands you to do, and the game demands you to be a good teammate, too, and play as hard as you can.

I'm thankful for my time with Coach Garrido. There's no doubt about that. I love the University of Oklahoma and what it represents. It's like a family environment. That's what's awesome about it.

Q. I know it's kind of adding on to that, I know it's probably pretty tough because the season just ended, but are you able to have an appreciation for this year and everything the team accomplished and this run?

SKIP JOHNSON: No, not really. I wanted to win the national championship. That's what my goal was. It'll continue to be my goal. You and John, y'all fueled us a lot all year long with the tweets about us, the last place team in the SEC. I wanted to wait until the end and tell you I appreciated that, and so did every player on our team.

Q. Can you talk about the growth you've seen from Cade over the course of the season?

SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, it was something that I experienced already with Cade Cavalli. Cade was a two-way guy when we got him, and early in the year as a freshman, he comes in and whatever it is, he had it. Then we go into January and he gets hurt.

I'll never forget this as long as I live, we just got beat in Tulsa from playing Oklahoma State, and he's sitting right behind my bus seat, and I turn around and he stared out the window all night long, the whole ride home.

I thought to myself, I was like, this guy is made of something different. Being a coach, you've got to look at stuff like that. You've got to find the value in what those guys go through.

When he started and coming back from the fall, our trainers and our strength coaches did an outstanding job of every day doing something with him to get him better, and then we started the season off the first month, he was our starting third baseman. We kind of knew what was going

to happen, if it went down that road, his arm started feeling better. We started throwing bullpens.

So we had Cade Cavalli before, we were throwing him in relief, and then we started starting him at the end of his sophomore year. So that's what we started doing with him is we were throwing him early in relief, then we started starting him at the end of the year, and he got better and better and better and better.

I still don't think he's a finished product. He's really good. I get it. But he's got poise. He's got demeanor. He understands -- he's regurgitating everything that we talk about, one pitch at a time, going to releases, taking deep breaths, staying in his routines. He's talking like a guy that's a professional, and he's still got a lot to grow in that area.

And I'm so proud of him, I can't -- that's what we talk about. That's what the University of Oklahoma is about. It's about developing young men in that role.

Q. I want to ask you further about Cade, just his performance today. How good was that College World Series Championship Series record, 13 strikeouts, they just kept piling up as the pressure mounted?

SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, he wanted to go back out that inning, and I said one guy gets home, we're going to go to Trevin. You could see him on the mound. That's what you want out of a young man.

Sooner or later, we as coaches and as pitching coach as I am, I got to take the ball out of his hand because he's going to go until he can't go anymore. That's in his DNA. He's going to battle you.

That's what's awesome about him, watching him play high school football or watching him pitching a game or having an at-bat, that's who he is, that's what he's about. I couldn't find a better young man to represent the University of Oklahoma than him.

Q. You've talked about this a little bit already, but game ends and you get back in the locker room, around the guys. It's probably difficult, but what is that message, first thing you talk to them about? What do you say when that happens?

SKIP JOHNSON: First thing is you can accomplish anything you put your mind to it. You can be anybody you want to be, you put your mind to it. Secondly, the game doesn't care how you feel. That's why the details of the game are so important, and you've got to keep fighting for every inch that you get in baseball. You've got to continue

to work.

You did a great job. I love you. Really proud of you.
Really proud of the coaches.

What they did and what they accomplished was incredible.
We've got to continue to grow as a team. We've got to --
I'm just happy in that sense. Mad, pissed off about losing.
I'm not happy about that.

Q. Cade was talking about how this team had to learn to win, and obviously you guys did that. To do that, though, at a time when you guys really needed to start to pile up some wins to make the NCAA tournament, really get some momentum, how hard of a task was that, what your guys accomplished, really turning the corner like they did this season?

SKIP JOHNSON: Well, the one thing that you can -- in baseball, confidence is a fragile piece of ice. The guys at the end of the game, wanting the ball, wanting to be in situations, they're in control of themselves. The moment is not too big for them. Wanting a ground ball hit to them, wanting a fly ball hit to them.

The mindset of the guys hitting on the bench. The bench guys are just as important as the guys on the field because their synergy provides what goes on in the game.

They got through that. They broke through that mold of knowing how to win and understanding what that is and wanting the ball hit to them, wanting to be in those situations.

I can remember Peyton Graham hitting a grand slam, I forget who it was, to win the game. It was incredible. I think we hit two of them. Those guys come hitting a two-run homer in Florida to tie the game. It was just incredible.

That's what he's talking about when they figured out how to win and how they figured out how to pull for each other, whether it's bringing Diego in to hit or him getting that bunt down or Sebastian coming off when Brett got hurt. That's what shows you what a good culture is about. Guys are still -- they understand they have value and they understand they're going to fight to the bitter end.

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