

2023 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 15, 2023
Omaha, Nebraska, USA

TCU Horned Frogs

Coach Kirk Saarloos

Tre Richardson

Sam Stoutenborough

Brayden Taylor

Press Conference



we go out there and compete, play our baseball, play our good team baseball, and I'm just really excited to be out there.

Q. This is for both Tre and Brayden. Could you kind of discuss just what your understanding is of how the ballpark plays? A lot of home runs have been hit this season. This place traditionally has held the ball in a little bit. Maybe not so much in recent years, but historically.

THE MODERATOR: Tre, you start.

TRE RICHARDSON: Well, first thing I want to say is we've played majority of our games in Lupton this year, so I would say that considering that, we're in a pretty sweet spot.

We took BP out there. It seemed like if you hit the baseball pretty well, it was going to do something. So, you know, we take that with a grain of salt. We know the type of team that we are, and we know our identity.

Regardless of at the ballpark if the ball flies or doesn't fly, we're just going to go out there and play the type of game that we've played and do what got us here and keep on doing it, so...

THE MODERATOR: Brayden.

BRAYDEN TAYLOR: Just to build off that, I don't think it really matters how each ballpark plays as a mindset goes for an offense, but I feel like if we go up there and play our good baseball, not change our approach. We're not trying to go up there and hit home runs. Trying to get a good pitch to hit and put a good swing on it. That's all we have to do.

Q. This question is for Sam. You guys are going up against Oral Roberts tomorrow. They're one of the top teams in the nation by batting average and runs scored. How are you guys preparing to face them defensively, especially as we mentioned in a park that might not be as friendly to home runs?

THE MODERATOR: Kirk, welcome. Congratulations. Give us an overview.

KIRK SAARLOOS: Thank you, Bill. Overview, there's a lot of people outside of our locker room that probably didn't think we would be here a month or two ago, but the resiliency and our team and our program obviously -- the guys did the work, and we're here because of them.

I just want -- we're back where we should be, in my opinion, for TCU baseball. It had been six years. We had gone four years in a row and five total, and I think Fort Worth and TCU thought it was super easy to get to a World Series, and it's really hard.

So I couldn't be more proud in terms of our program being back in Omaha. Every team starts the year with that goal in mind, and we're one of eight. Congratulations to the other seven teams as well on making it to Omaha, and we're looking for an exciting College World Series.

Can't wait to watch our guys play.

THE MODERATOR: We'll direct questions now for the student-athletes.

Q. Question for Brayden. There's a ton of potential first round talent here this week. What do you make of all the great players that are here with you?

BRAYDEN TAYLOR: I think it's outstanding that there's tons of good teams, tons of good players here.

What I'm really just more looking forward to is seeing how



SAM STOUTENBOROUGH: Really just like any other game, if I'm going to be honest. We try to simplify things over here. The simpler the better in our opinion, so we're just going to go out there, execute pitches, try to get outs and treat it like any other game really.

Q. This is for any of the players that would want to answer this. Oral Roberts is a No. 4 regional seed, and everybody has kind of made them out to be an underdog, although I know a lot of people in college baseball are not all that surprised about what they've done. But just kind of what you have made of Oral Roberts, your first opponent, and the run they've been on?

THE MODERATOR: Tre, you start.

TRE RICHARDSON: Yeah, if you are good enough to make it to the College World Series, you've got my respect. I mean, that's the mindset.

We heard the same thing about Indiana State and them being a mid-major. You're playing deep in June, you're a good ball club. That's something we take into consideration.

At the end of the day we just -- if we focus on us more than the opponent that we're playing, we're going to be in the best situation. Oral Roberts is a good ball club. We have a few people I know over there on that side, and so I have an idea of what they're about.

But at the end of the day we're going out there to play TCU baseball. We're not going out there to, okay, we have to tighten up because we're playing our first game in the College World Series. That's the mindset as a team.

THE MODERATOR: Sam.

SAM STOUTENBOROUGH: Pretty much what Tre said. If you are playing in Omaha in June, you're a pretty damn good club. There's not much else to it.

We're just going to be focused on us and taking it one game at a time.

THE MODERATOR: Brayden.

BRAYDEN TAYLOR: Like these guys hit the nail on the head. They're a good ball club. They're going to give us their best, and we have to be ready and give them our best.

Q. This one is also for all the players. As you guys have said, if you are playing deep in June, you've

obviously got a lot of great talent on your team, but that might not have been expected for you guys at one point in April and May. You guys were sitting at 23-20, and you have only lost two games since then. What do you think has contributed to the turnaround for you guys? You have only lost one game since I think May 6th. What's been the cause of this hot streak? How do you plan on continuing it through Omaha?

THE MODERATOR: Brayden, you start.

BRAYDEN TAYLOR: I just think at that point in the season a lot of us got tired of playing the way that we were, so we needed -- we realized that we needed to change something, so what that really was was just go out there and start having more fun, playing with our backs against the wall.

I mean, we just haven't stopped since. My plan is just to continue doing what we do, play our good baseball.

THE MODERATOR: Sam.

SAM STOUTENBOROUGH: I'm not thinking about it too much. We saw at the beginning of the year what we were capable of, and then we hit a rough spot, like every team does.

The belief I think in our locker room never faltered. We always knew that we would eventually get back to where we want to get to.

I don't know if any of us imaged it to go this far, but we knew what kind of club we were, and we weren't -- we were kind of just keeping it with us, the 36 guys on our team and our coaches. We weren't really listening to any of that outside noise.

Yeah, it's all you.

THE MODERATOR: Tre.

TRE RICHARDSON: Yeah, it was like Sam said. We just hit a rough patch, but I think the biggest thing was just understanding that it was always right in front of us, and it was right in front of us from the start. It was right in front of us when we were struggling, and it's right in front of us now.

So having that mindset of just understanding that the most important game is the next game. Whatever team we play has to play us for nine innings. And if the game calls for more than nine, then, by all means, but playing us for nine innings isn't easy. And that's been our motto and mentality going through this whole thing, so...



Q. Tre, you probably have been asked this a bunch since it's happened a couple of weeks ago, but the game that you had with the two slams and the 11 RBIs, the other home run, what did you think? If you look back, that's not necessarily your game. What was it like in the aftermath of that? What did you make of that when you thought about that?

TRE RICHARDSON: I mean, obviously nobody ever wakes up in the morning and says, you know, I'll going to hit three home runs, and it actually happens.

It was just -- I kept doing the same thing that I have been doing. I'm fortunate enough to have teammates that got on before me because my mindset was a lot easier going up bases loaded both at-bats and knowing there was nowhere that they were going to put me.

So that was the biggest thing. I mean, it wasn't anything different than what I have been doing all year. I pride myself in being able to go opposite field. In a sense that was my game, and I was able to get it out three times.

Like I said, it goes back to the team that we have. There's no easy outs. Being in that position two times and then a third time understanding what the approach was and sticking to the approach, I mean, that was awesome.

But, yeah, I didn't feel like I did anything different that day.

Q. This question is for Tre. Tre, I want to talk to you about your journey. You graduated high school early. You deal with the COVID year. You transfer. You finally get your first taste of the NCAA Tournament. Obviously you make some history in the process. Knowing there's still work to be done, where does making it to Omaha rank on the goals as a kid growing up here in H-town?

TRE RICHARDSON: Yeah, I mean, that's always been -- making it to Omaha has always been a dream. I think the older and older you get and when you are on a team that expects to go to Omaha, it just becomes a part of the journey.

That's really been the majority of everything that we've done over the last few weeks has just been a part of the journey. The end goal is to be the last team standing, and that's something that we're going for.

For me individually, I'm just happy to be playing baseball in June. I mean, I remember sitting around the couch this time last year and just knowing that this is what I should be doing. I should be playing baseball in June.

That was part of the whole transfer process is finding a university that I thought that could make it there, and I trusted the staff and also the players that were coming back and the players that were coming in that this would be a team that -- this would be a very special team that would make it.

Like I said before, the end goal is to get a ring, so that's why we're here, and that's what we're focused on.

Q. This one is for Tre or Brayden. During the beginning of the season, you guys had a stretch -- at the beginning of the season you guys had a stretch where defense wasn't your strong point, and then you really fine-tuned it, and now you are playing the best defense of the year. What had to happen for you guys to get to that point?

THE MODERATOR: Brayden.

BRAYDEN TAYLOR: I think just continuing to practice at it, get better at it, get those repetitions.

Sure, we weren't playing the way we wanted to. As soon as you see any problem, you want to go fix it. So I feel like just trusting Coach Bruce with working with the infielders on the defensive side, I feel like we just kept getting better and better at it, and we're just going to keep continuing to do it.

TRE RICHARDSON: Yeah, we just trusted and loved the process. I mean, that's the biggest thing is it's not easy to get up every single day and, you know, put in the work that we do. At the end of the day, if you want to do it, it's what you have to do to be a winner.

That's what we all want to do is we all want to win. We just kept putting the work in. Like Brayden said, kept trusting, enjoying the process. I mean, it's gotten us here, but that's just part of our team identity is good defense. It's something that Coach Bruce harps about. That's something that we're going to take with us.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the players now, and then we'll start with questions for the coach.

Q. Coach, you have seen this thing from all sides. Can you compare and contrast being here and now being at the helm and what that's like, Coach?

KIRK SAARLOOS: I've been asked that quite a bit, and I think the baseball part of it is no different. Being an assistant and watching our team secure the last out to go to Omaha and being a head coach, I mean, it was the

exact same thing.

I think the only difference is having to do a lot more of this, you know, and having to talk to media a lot more. Just in terms of running the program.

In terms of the difference of getting to Omaha, it doesn't -- two times as a player at Cal State Fullerton and now five times here as a coach at TCU, they're all amazing. They're all amazing.

Q. What's your pitching plans?

KIRK SAARLOOS: Yeah, we're going to -- just like we did last week in our super regional, we're going to start Kole Klecker.

Q. What did you make of Oral Roberts and just the way they got through that super regional after having that eight-run lead evaporate on them to win, and they lose Game 1, and then they come back and walk-off Oregon, and then they clinch it in Game 3? What's that say to you, and what was your impression?

KIRK SAARLOOS: Well, I knew even them being in Oklahoma state, in Stillwater, as a 4 seed, it was crazy to think that a ball club like that was going to be a 4 seed.

Obviously, you don't just luck into -- I think they had probably 46 or 47 wins before the postseason even started, and Coach Folmar does an awesome job at Oral Roberts. And we played them last year in the College Station regional, so we're familiar with them.

They're going to be tough. They're always hard-nosed, tough ball club. I think that shows, like you said. There's not many teams that can take what they took on Friday night with what was on the line, being up 8-0 and then losing, and then to come back and win the next two days and do it on the road, you know, that's something special.

So like our players said, really the seeding goes out the window. You are one of eight now. Whether they're a 4 seed and we were a 2 seed, all that stuff doesn't matter. The big thing is there's a lot of really good teams here, and they're all hot.

No matter who is in the other dugout, we're going to have our hands full regardless.

Q. You touched on some of this stuff in terms of Oral Roberts' record and the success that they've had, the fact that you played them last year. You know, they've got the numbers, but they are in the Summit League. You're obviously a Big 12 team and see Big 12

competition. What do you see in Oral Roberts? What stands out most to you about them?

KIRK SAARLOOS: Well, they're an older group. They've got older players, which nowadays with the transfer portal, you look at the construction of a lot of teams, and you have a lot of -- you have 18-year-old kids who are freshmen going against 22- and 23-year-old kids on the other team and vice versa.

They have a wide range of ages, and they're going to be a veteran, older group that they know how to win. I think they have 51 wins, I believe, and they have the recipe and they understand what it means and how to win.

I don't care what league they're in. We played Indiana State last week, another unbelievable club from the Missouri Valley. There's great baseball all over the country.

For me the only difference is maybe just resources. In the Power Five you get a little bit more resources than maybe you do in the group of five, but does that mean that they don't -- they're not as good? Heck no. They're here. They have 51 wins, and them, like anybody else, could win this thing.

Q. Looking back at the Texas Tech series, what was tough during that time? What needed to happen in order for the team to play different baseball during that time period of the season?

KIRK SAARLOOS: The Texas Tech series, we had that same lead. I think we were up 8-0, 9-0 in the series and lost Friday night.

I think that weekend and then also the West Virginia weekend in terms of being on the road the middle part of the year, getting swept, and having that taste in your mouth. The only thing that you can do is stay together and not listen to anybody on the outside because everybody is going to have an opinion, but the only opinion that matters is the 36 guys that we have on our roster and our coaches and our support staff, and that never wavered.

So baseball is a weird sport. It's super weird. It's tough. It's a lot like life. It will teach you a ton of lessons. If you just keep showing up with the right mentality and the right attitude, it's amazing what can happen.

Q. Kirk, you have obviously had a lot of College World Series experience. You pitched at the launch pad that was Rosenblatt Stadium. You were here when the ball really wasn't very good for home runs in this park. Then, of course, it's gotten a little bit more -- the ball



flies a little better now. But what's the secret sauce, I guess, for being successful at a College World Series regardless of the ballpark?

KIRK SAARLOOS: Well, I think ultimately if you look at everybody here, they have -- their pitching staffs are allowing them to be in baseball games. You're not going to get here without a good pitching staff.

But I think you have to be multi-dimensional offensively. We talked as a team, and Coach Bruce talked to our club because he was on that 2013 UCLA national championship team, and we kind of had went around the room and talked a little bit and brought him up because he is the only one in that room that had won a national championship.

That club hit a dollar twenty-five. They hit a buck twenty-five and won a national championship. So, obviously, that was in a little different era when they were pitching with marshmallow balls and scoring runs was at a premium.

You can win in a lot of different ways. You see it now in Major League Baseball where it's home runs or strikeouts. You're seeing a lot of that in college baseball now where the difference between 2017, the last time that we were here, and today is what I notice was during BP.

The ball is definitely traveling further than it did in 2017. Watching our batting practice and watching it and remembering it from 2017 and '16, '15, and '15. In 2014 the wind was blowing in the whole week, and literally you couldn't score from second base on a base hit because the outfielders were playing so shallow because they weren't worried about some ball being hit over their head.

Well, now I think Pete Alonso is the first guy to hit a home run between the gaps out to center field. I think you're going to see a lot of those balls over the next two weeks. A, because there's a lot of talented hitters in this field, but I think it's a lot more offensive game than it was.

So to answer your question, I think you have to be able -- because you're going to face the best of the best on the mound, too. So you can't sit there and think that you're going to sit there and get your three-run home runs. You're going to have to run the bases and be aggressive and stealing bases, maybe use the inside and the bunt game.

There's a lot of different ways. Just depends on what the game calls.

Q. You said you were going to start Kole Klecker today like you did in the super regionals. As a pitcher yourself, what does it mean for you to have a guy in

Klecker, who is only a freshman, be able to be ready for this moment and for you to know and trust he is going to bring his A game despite his youth and relative inexperience?

KIRK SAARLOOS: I think the big thing for Kole is he has consistently done it the whole year. The other thing he prides himself on is kind of his routine and his ability to slow the game down and understand that it's just one pitch and worrying about that pitch and the next one will take care of itself.

So he stays in the moment pretty well. To run him out in front of 9,000 people last week against Indiana State in his home ballpark, he just turned 18. He is a super young freshman, but he is mature in terms of his mental game.

I think the big thing is he deserves the right to be the first guy out on the mound for TCU tomorrow at 1:00 because he has put himself in that position. His teammates trust him. I think it says a lot about Kole.

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