

# 2023 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 15, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**Virginia Cavaliers**

**Coach Brian O'Connor**

**Jake Gelof**

**Nick Parker**

**Ethan Anderson**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome home, Brian.

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Certainly it's an honor to be here on behalf of our team and our university. The University of Virginia is very, very passionate and our community of Charlottesville as well about our baseball program and the success that these young men have and the opportunity that they have in front of them over the next two weeks.

We're excited to be back in Omaha. Fortunately this being our sixth trip since 2009 is something that we're incredibly proud of.

This year's version is a really, really special team that's had a tremendous year wire-to-wire and is very, very good in every phase of the game. I'm just so excited for these players, these three men, and the rest of our roster to have the opportunity to compete here in Omaha for a national championship.

That's what it's about. It's not about just being in Omaha. It's about the opportunity that they have in front of them out in that stadium over the next two weeks.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Brian, you talked about when does that switch flip from making it to Omaha to, all right, now we have a game to play tomorrow?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Well --

THE MODERATOR: Let's do student-athletes first, please.

**Q. For Ethan and Nick, this is your first time out there. What is that experience like? I know you all walked out yesterday, but just looking at that and, again, when does that switch kind of flip for you guys?**

THE MODERATOR: Ethan.

ETHAN ANDERSON: First time playing in a stadium that big. I know Disharoon, it's a pretty fun atmosphere to play in and a lot of seats, but there are seats all around here. I just can't wait to see it get hopefully fully packed for tomorrow night. I'm not sure what the seating looks like.

NICK PARKER: Yeah, it's an incredible experience, honestly. I'll be very excited to see what tomorrow night brings and the atmosphere. There's not much -- just have to provide all the juice that you need to get going for tomorrow night.

**Q. Nick, your old roommate from Coastal is on the other side. What do you remember about BT?**

NICK PARKER: BT, he is a great dude, man. I'm glad to see he has been doing well over there at Florida. It's pretty neat after all these years we've run back into each other on this stage. Pretty neat. Pretty special.

**Q. This is for Jake and Ethan. You guys have both been really hot hitting as of late. Ethan, you have hits in nine of your last ten games. Jake, you had three hits, 7 RBIs in one of the games at Duke. Is there anything in particular that you are doing now that postseason play has started to sort of reach that next level, or is it more just keep doing what you are doing and hope for the best?**

THE MODERATOR: Jake, you start.

JAKE GELOF: Just keep doing what we're doing. We've been having a great approach all year and just have kept doing that in the postseason.

ETHAN ANDERSON: We haven't changed anything. The approach has been the same. You know, being the same team that we've always been, and good things happen.



**Q. For any of the players, do you guys talk about trying to get Coach O'Connor back home here to Omaha, or is that anything you even think about?**

THE MODERATOR: Nick, you start.

NICK PARKER: The goal every year is to get to Omaha, so...

JAKE GELOF: Yeah, of course, get to Omaha. It's a neat storyline for our head coach, but at the end of the day it's about getting here and winning a national championship. That's what we do all fall, early spring, start of the season to get here and try to win a national championship.

ETHAN ANDERSON: Yeah, from the fall and the summer, we always break down to Omaha. This is what we play for. Hearing from Jake and Kyle, the steaks here are really good, and I can confirm that from last night.

**Q. Jake, you have been here before. Does it kind of wear off on you a little bit when you come back here?**

JAKE GELOF: No, definitely not. We had a bunch of media stuff going on before practice, and the team had already started stretching. By the time I got out there, I wasn't even -- I did a couple of sprints, warmed up my arm a little bit, but I didn't feel like I even needed it. It was nice and hot out there.

Just being in this great atmosphere and like we just talked about, with a lot of fans and getting ready to play some great baseball.

**Q. This one is for Jake. A lot of the attention is centered around how you and Kyle Teel play. How have you handled that this season, and how has it impacted the way you guys play?**

JAKE GELOF: Handled what? Sorry.

**Q. Handled the pressure of getting all the attention in the lineup typically, but you and Kyle.**

JAKE GELOF: I wouldn't really describe it as pressure. I just say we go out there, and we play baseball, me and him. A bunch of these guys on this team have been playing baseball all their lives, so we've been equipped our whole lives, and especially once getting here, like I said in the fall and early spring and at the start of the season, throughout the whole season.

**Q. This is just for all the players. You guys were pretty dominant in the regular season, won the Coastal**

**Division regular season title and then lost to Carolina in the ACC tournament. How have you guys sort of bounced back from that over the course of these last few weeks?**

THE MODERATOR: Ethan.

ETHAN ANDERSON: It's a baseball game. ACC is -- you have to win both games, and the second game we came out a little unlucky.

I wouldn't say we got cold then. We just keep on doing what we've been doing, and we're in Omaha now, so...

JAKE GELOF: Yeah, kind of similar. The ACC tournament format is a little unique to where you lose one game, and you are out, which isn't like the NCAA tournament.

Just keeping with whatever we've been doing and staying with that.

NICK PARKER: Yeah, I think at this point of the year, especially ACC tournament and after that, it's just survive and advance. Just a bunch of Buffalos surviving and advancing.

**Q. Nick, from rooming with BT, did you know back then that he had aspirations to be an investment banker and so forth and everything like that? Did he talk even about that back then, or is it a little surprising that he is not continuing baseball?**

NICK PARKER: I'm sure he mentioned it before, but he is a terrific baseball player. Man, he is really good.

And whatever he wants to pursue is what he pursues, and I'm happy for him in whatever he does.

**Q. Jake, you guys did not play Wake Forest this year. They're on the other side of the bracket. So what do you make of just Wake Forest's season this year? Obviously, you want to play them at the end, but just kind of -- could you discuss a little bit about what your thoughts are on that team?**

JAKE GELOF: Yeah, it's pretty crazy that they haven't lost a weekend series all year. We play in a great league in the ACC. It's been awesome to see. Whether it's their Wheels highlights on YouTube or stuff like that. They have a great ball club, and it's been awesome to follow them throughout the ACC.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse you guys, and we'll open it up here in a moment for questions for Coach

O'Connor.

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Do they have to leave?

THE MODERATOR: You can stay if you want.

BRIAN O'CONNOR: They're always trying to learn.

JAKE GELOF: Maybe we have a couple of questions for you.

BRIAN O'CONNOR: (Laughing.)

**Q. I'm the designated asking questioner about pitching. Is Nick going to go tomorrow?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Yes, Nick Parker will start tomorrow, that's correct.

**Q. Before just when you get off the plane, you go and walk out onto the field and everything, when do you kind of feel like the switch kind of flips for the team in your experience?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Well, certainly I think a big moment when you get here to Omaha is to take the team to the ballpark, which we did. First ones to arrive and get them in the ballpark so they can get in the dugout and walk out on the warning track a little bit and see what this place is like because for many of them, it's mythical. You know, it's just something you talk about all the time, and they see it on TV, and their first opportunity. Certainly Jake was here in '21.

But a lot of them, they've never been here to Omaha. So, honestly, I think that's a big moment.

I think practice today is a big one as well where you can run around on the field and get the feel of the stadium a little bit. Listen, they're prepared. They're excited.

I think one of the things that's really important to do when you get here to Omaha is to stay in character, right? I think a lot of individual players and teams can make a mistake to try to be a team they're not, and this is a very, very special team, very talented, and very gritty and tough. They've earned this opportunity.

They'll be ready to play. I have no doubt about that.

**Q. You've been out in this ballpark. When you first were here, the ball was not doing anything. It was pretty sparse. It seems like home runs are really picking up. What's kind of -- the way the field lays out with the big outfield, kind of what's the key here, do**

**you think, offensively for teams?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Well, I think the key is to stay in the gaps. It really is. You know, it's a big ballpark. It's actually very similar to our ballpark in Charlottesville.

It's only 3 feet further in this stadium in left field and right field than it is in our ballpark. We play in a pretty vast ballpark, so our guys are used to that.

Somebody told me this morning, and I didn't even realize it, that they were leading the country in doubles. That's a pretty important stat, I believe, in this ballpark because having coached previous teams here and seeing guys like Mike Papi and Derek Fisher and different players over the years that have played for us in this ballpark and see them absolutely crush balls and not get the ball out of the ballpark, so it's important that you put the ball in play. A good two-strike approach. Certainly the pitching that you face this time of the year is elite, right? That's a challenge in itself.

Staying in the gaps and runs are a lot of times tough to come by because of the level of defense and pitching that you face, so it comes down to clutch two-out RBIs and putting the ball in play.

**Q. You talked about the mythical qualities of being here and being in Omaha, but also the importance of stepping up in the big moments. How do you as a coach and your staff make sure that the players are both prepared for the moment, but not sort of intimidated by it?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Sure. That's a great question. I think that's really important to have success here in Omaha is to have a plan for that.

We met as a team on Monday. I keep a journal of all of our last trips and what was our itinerary, what did we do here, when can we give the players downtime so they can just breathe, right, and enjoy the moment and just relax and be with each other?

We had that conversation with our dugout on Monday. We continue to talk about it. You know, talk about things about staying in character and doing what we do. Those are important things, having success all year long, and they become very important here in Omaha.

So this team has showed incredible poise all year. That's one of the best qualities I think you can have as a team is not to panic and show poise because -- and then in these big moments when you are in a bigger stadium when it means as much as it ever has, they can handle the



moment.

This team has shown that ability, and it's a great, great quality of theirs.

**Q. Leading the nation in batting average, anything to your approach that has kind of carried that throughout the course of the season?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Yeah, it's called great players (laughing). It really is. I mean, we have got a really talented lineup. It's a tough lineup.

I don't know what the statistics are, but our hits with two strikes are two-out rallies and things like that have been a trademark of this team this year.

And the depth in the lineup is really good. One through nine, there's opportunities to score runs. You know, they've done it all year long. Like Jake said, it's been very consistent.

We didn't do this just lately the last couple of weeks. Certainly we've got a tremendous challenge in front of us. I'm very aware of the pitcher from Florida tomorrow night and his talent, and that will be a great opportunity for our guys to compete and show what they're made of.

But, you know, their performance on the field, the consistency of the batting average, doubles, and things like that, that's ingrained in them from day one and how we put our practice together, our preparation, our development system.

You do that, you believe in it, then it can stay consistent throughout the year and allows them to perform at the most important time.

**Q. You have been here a lot. The guy on the other side tomorrow night has been here a lot and is a UVA alum.**

What's your relationship with Kevin like, and what's that been like facing him over the years?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: I admire the job that Coach O'Sullivan has done at Florida. It's a great job in college baseball, and he has done as good as anybody has done in -- I believe he has been there 15 years.

What he has done to get his teams to Omaha, to win a national championship, to compete year in and year out is impressive. This game is hard. There's a lot of great teams that don't get here, and you come here as much as Florida has been speaks to the level of his coaching ability,

his staff, and certainly his players.

So he obviously played at the University of Virginia. I'm sure he is very fond of his time there at the university and has had one heck of a coaching career. I admire the work that he has done.

**Q. You and Coach O'Sullivan and Coach Walter all played together in Harrisonburg when you guys were in college for one summer. What do you remember from that summer, and what is it like to kind of share the stage, I guess, and be here at the same time? Especially Coach Walter trying to win his first.**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: That was an exciting summer that actually was my first time ever in the state of Virginia playing for the Harrisonburg Turks. Our manager, Bob Wease, is a great man. Still comes over to our games.

The uniqueness of it, actually, it's not only Coach O'Sullivan, Tom Walters, there's been other coaches as well that played on that team that summer.

It was a great summer, and we had a terrific time. Who would know that all of a sudden there would be coaches here in Omaha that played on the same summer team.

I'm really happy for Wake Forest and Coach Walter. He is a very good coach and known him for a long time. The year they're having is incredibly impressive. To be the overall No. 1 national seed is incredibly hard to do. We've been fortunate to have done that before in our program, and that speaks to the level of the talent that he has on his team for sure.

**Q. What has the emergence of Anthony Stephan meant to the lineup, especially since his power has shown up since entering the NCAA tournament? I think he has three home runs over the last two weekends.**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Well, Anthony Stephan is a great player. I'm incredibly proud of him. He worked really hard this summer in the Northwoods League and became a legend up there.

He has a spirit about him that I love. He is fun to be around. He keeps things loose. The players previously had ribbed on him all the time in BP because he can't get a ball out of the ballpark, but certainly what he has done all year long.

Candidly, I felt like when we injected him into the lineup every day and early on in the season, he wasn't in the lineup every day, and we were kind of moving different

pieces around. I think it's been a real shot in our arm to our lineup the fact that he has been in there every day and delivers.

What I didn't know about Tony, as we call him, is that I didn't know how successful he would be against left-handed pitching and just kept him in there in the Florida State series a couple of times.

Previously I pinch-hit for him when they bring a lefty in, and he is -- his numbers are as good against left-handed pitching as it is right-handed pitching. I'm just proud of him. Really am. He is one of the great stories on our team and what he has delivered for this ball club.

**Q. Both and you Coach O'Sullivan have experience not only coming to Omaha, but winning in Omaha. That's kind of rare in this tournament with some new teams like Oral Roberts and Stanford who don't have as much tournament experience coming in. Is there any difference that you think from being a coach who hasn't won one before to after? How does that change your coaching style and strategy at all?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Well, it develops over time. Obviously experience gives you wisdom. That said, Coastal Carolina won the national championship a couple of years ago and hadn't been here before.

So it's certainly not a requirement, right? But as you gain knowledge and wisdom of whatever it is that you do, that can help prepare in this case your team to give them the best chance to be successful.

I'm sure Sully would say the same thing. I don't think there's either one of us that have any secrets about doing it. Just good players, good programs, good teams.

Then you learn through time, like what do you do with your pitching in certain situations? This format is so different than everything we experience all year, right? Everything is about a three-game series. A regional could go four or five games. This is different because it's spread out, so you can do some different thing.

You can take a starting pitcher and put him in the bullpen, somebody that might have started for you the last three weeks -- two weekends and inject them into your bullpen, and that can make a huge difference in you winning a ball game.

Those are the things that I think how you handle your team, how you handle pitching, how you handle moments game to game, things like that, that I can help from experience.

**Q. Coach, kind of a bigger picture question. I saved this kind of late. Your thoughts on the transfer portal window being open this time of year, particularly for a program like yours that's making a run right now in Omaha. A little awkward timing-wise, and how do you balance that?**

BRIAN O'CONNOR: I think it's a little awkward. Certainly for the teams that are playing, right, because your focus is to winning tomorrow, and that will always be our focus before the next player. It has to be.

You also have to pay attention to maybe what your needs might be next year and try to plug some players in if it's necessary in particular programs.

I don't know what the answer is. I don't have the answer. Somebody smarter than me probably does have some answers to it, but it has to be in my opinion where it's at. It needs to be at the end of the season for most all the teams in college baseball. We're just fortunate to still be playing and still have the opportunity in front of us.

Listen, the transfer portal is here to stay, and it's part of college athletics. Each program has to decide how are they going to use it, if at all, to develop their program.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports