

# 2023 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**Stanford Cardinal**

**Coach David Esquer**

**Quinn Mathews**

**Alberto Rios**

Press Conference



We're excited to be here, and I'm blessed to be here for my seventh time. Twice as a player, and fortunate enough to be here as an assistant coach under Coach Marquess, and then was able to take a team at Cal for a year, and then these last three years at Stanford have been a blessing.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start off with questions for student-athletes.

**Q. This is for both players. What advantage is there to having experience here? This isn't your first time. You kind of know where things are in the stadium. You probably don't have to figure things out in terms of moving around, so what advantage is there to having experience here?**

THE MODERATOR: Quinn, you start.

QUINN MATHEWS: I think the big advantage is, like you said, we've been here, we've played here. You know the ground. You know the field. You know the atmosphere, and you know what it's like to try and go to sleep at night, honestly, with the jitters, the energy, the adrenaline of being here. The excitement amongst the team, the practices. Everything is amplified a little bit.

I also think there's a little bit of a disadvantage because, as you said, you are so familiar with the things. You have a certain set of expectations as a team here for the third time.

It's not, like you said, all advantage. There are some disadvantages to it.

ALBERTO RIOS: I think it's just getting your feet on the ground and stuff. I think we know what it takes. I think we've been here, gosh, three times for some people. It's just a familiar territory. We know what it takes. We know what we need to do, and I think it's just a matter of time that we just go out there, play our game and let the chips fall where they will.

**Q. I guess for both players, we heard what Coach Esquer said about what it means to get here with this team. What about from the players' perspective? Just**

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Stanford news conference. We'll start first, Dave, give us an overview, please.

DAVID ESQUER: Well, this never gets old. I could come back here every year and bring a team and give them this experience and be happy just for them to experience the whole postseason, whether it's a regional because obviously, again, you have to win a regional and super regional, and those are exciting enough.

Then the big payoff at the end is to come here to Omaha and experience just how the town opens up and welcomes you and just the festivities and the practice on the feed.

Then we're going to get to the real baseball where eight of the best teams in the country will square off. That's what we have here, eight teams that everybody has heard of or been on the rise and coming at the end of the season and finish the season hot.

I think our bracket is especially difficult, which will be a great challenge.

We're fortunate. We have a great year, and we have a good ball club. When you have the player of the year in the conference and the pitcher of the year in the conference it gives you a good chance to have the season that you're looking for.

I'm blessed to coach them. I asked them at the end of the regional and the super regional that all I'm asking is give me one more day to coach them because they're so much fun to be around and practice is as gratifying as the games with how we go about our business.

**what do you guys think it means to get this team here and have your season end in Omaha?**

ALBERTO RIOS: I think for the past few years we knew we had a talented group of guys. We knew we had the personnel to get here every single year.

For the past three seasons it's not been an easy road here, with tough regionals, super regionals and stuff. I think with our group of guys we knew that we had the chance to make it again for the third time.

That was our expectation, and now we're here, and we know we're not going to stop whatsoever.

QUINN MATHEWS: Kind of going off that, like Alberto said, we've always had the personnel to do it. And I think this year especially the regional and the super regional really tested us and almost pushed us to the limit. I'm not saying the years past didn't, but this year, especially with Texas A&M, Fullerton, San Jose State, and then Texas, four really good squads, compared to the years prior, maybe just a little bit better. It gave us that edge that hopefully puts us over the top here this year.

Ultimately, it's a blessing to be back for a third time. It's a blessing to come once. To be back for a third time is phenomenal.

**Q. This question is for both the players. Quinn, you mentioned the regionals and the super regionals. In both of those, you guys had to win consecutive games against really good teams against Texas A&M, and then against Texas in the super regionals to even make it to this point of the season. What do you think it says about the team that when your backs were against the wall, not once but twice, in the span of about a week or so, you guys were able to come through?**

THE MODERATOR: Quinn.

QUINN MATHEWS: Like you said, we played two elimination games against Texas A&M, a game against Fullerton, and two elimination games against Texas. Five straight elimination games against three quality opponents. It says the team rises when we need to, and when pushed we can answer the bell.

It's a very talented group of guys, but it's also a war-tested group of guys at this point. I think it will pay dividends hopefully this week in Omaha. If it doesn't, so be it.

In terms of being tested up to this point in the regional and the normal regional and super regional, we've been tested,

and the guys rose to the occasion when we needed them to.

ALBERTO RIOS: I think with our guys we always have the saying of let's have one more practice, let's wear the jersey one more time. And I think especially with this group with the guys that have gone here for the past three years and stuff, we just don't want to take the jerseys off. As simple as that. We want to play as many games as we can together. We want to play as many games as we can here at Charles Schwab, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

If we keep that same mentality, I couldn't see why we couldn't make a run here.

**Q. Quinn, how are you holding up after that load the other night, and then two questions really about that. Number one, what do you say to the critics that are out there about that load that you put forth? Then what makes you physically able to do that?**

QUINN MATHEWS: I feel good today. I mean, I've just played catch every day since basically. Didn't take a day off and didn't screw up the routine. The body feels good. The mind was a little drained. I'm not going to lie to you. That probably took the bigger brunt of the whole they can.

I feel good. I don't know how I'm physically able to do it. I guess I've just been blessed with an ability and through time and through the work not just this past year, but through my whole life I've always thrown a lot. I've kind of prided myself on being able to throw, not taking days off.

You learn how to throw with soreness and fatigue and stuff like that, and it's just athletics and pushing yourself. I think it's just been my whole life I've just tested myself in terms of my physical capabilities.

Then to the critics out there, I'm just appreciative of them, honestly, that they're willing to put the time and energy to write stuff about me and talk about me and do all that. I mean, and I'm blessed that they care about my well-being and my health. I appreciate everyone that cares enough to put the time and energy to even care about me.

**Q. Alberto, to follow up on Quinn talking about his pitching performance on Sunday, you know, earlier he said that the team rises to the occasion. What did you in the dugout, on the field as that was happening -- what did the Stanford players take from that? What was the attitude like as that was happening?**

ALBERTO RIOS: I think when you see your top guy, your top dog do anything by any means necessary to get a win,



I think we just saw that. You know, he has led by example the entire year and just to see it at that time of the season was just something very special.

All of us very much appreciate him. Hey, let's go out here and do it for Quinn and do it for us and give the rock back to Quinn just one more time. That's exactly what we tried to do and exactly what we did.

**Q. You obviously have a unique glove color. What's the reasoning behind that?**

QUINN MATHEWS: Yeah. My glove is unique in the sense of it's purple, pink, and blue. So it's a little different. There's some nicknames for it. The first one was Dora. Someone called it Barney today.

I don't know. Just being a little different, I guess. I had a black glove and then another black glove and then another black glove, so I decided -- and before that I had a black glove in high school.

So I was like, why not do something different? I'm a senior. He is not going to yell at me for doing something out of the ordinary anymore. And fortunately we're past that point in the relationship. I figured why not do something a little different senior year, and if I hated it, I could go back to an old black glove.

**Q. This is for Alberto. You've been having an excellent postseason. I think you've hit safely in eight straight games, including that ninth inning double against Texas that was right off the wall, inches away from it. What goes into that preparation, especially in your first year as a full-time starter? What goes into all the preparation, and how can you explain the consistency that you have shown at the plate all year?**

ALBERTO RIOS: I think it's just for me and I think for most of our guys in our lineup, I think it's just moving it to the next guy.

I think we just have, God, guy after guy that can do it. If you are just able to set the table or just do whatever you can to just get on first base, I think that's just one thing that I pride in myself, is being able to get on base for guys behind me, whether it's Malcolm, Drew, or the bottom of our order.

I think if you are able to get on first base and get on base, as much as I simplified it, hitting as hard as it is. Whether it's a hit by pitch, drop third strike, God, a double off the wall or something like that, I just want to get on base for our team because we've got a special group of guys, and we have a staff that will hold our lead as much as possible.

That's exactly what it is. Just keeping it as simple as possible.

**Q. This is for both players. I know you play for your team, for your family, for yourselves, but what responsibility, if any, do you feel like you're representing West Coast baseball when you come here and you're the team from the West Coast?**

THE MODERATOR: Alberto.

ALBERTO RIOS: I think, yeah, seeing that map of the regional where we're the only team west of the Mississippi hosting, I think just prided us and prided what West Coast baseball is all about.

I think we're kind of on the shoulders of some great programs back home and stuff like that. I just -- you know, we know we have a resilient group who represents a large region of our country, and I think if -- I think with us and our players, I think we're just trying to be as good as possible for as long as possible. I think we're just representing that side for sure.

QUINN MATHEWS: I don't think there's any added weight or added pressure to representing the West Coast. Obviously that's just a part of it, and that's the nice part of playing at Stanford is we do get to do that, and we've been fortunate enough to do that.

But I think the best thing for me is just the players on the West Coast that have reached out. Like, going and playing summer ball, you get to meet a lot of guys. Even before that, high school teammates, stuff like that, who play on the West Coast in the Pac-12 specifically who reached out and were, like, you know, proud of you guys. Go do something in Omaha with it.

I think it's just the outreach from the players and the coaches that are also on the West Coast that may not get the opportunity that we have gotten is just the biggest thing and trying to make them proud also.

THE MODERATOR: You're excused. We'll open it up for questions for Dave in a moment.

Open it up for questions here for Coach.

**Q. Coach, the last thing Bill said to you last year was see you again next year. How have you kind of done your part to fulfill that prophecy?**

DAVID ESQUER: You never know. You really don't. You never know which team if they're going to be that team.



I always -- I remember back in 1987 when I said to myself, did Coach Marquess look in that locker room and say this is the team that is going to get it for me? There's no way he could have thought that. We had new players all over the place. I was a senior shortstop playing for the first time. We had a left fielder who was an infielder, we had a freshman -- so you just didn't know.

But, one, giving yourself the best chance and trying to keep them together. That's kind of been the hallmark of our program. For me, I always -- I say it over and over ad nauseam because they hear it all the time.

I just want to deliver the same experience that I had as a player at Stanford, which was I got to play with my best friends. I always talk about some of those relationships. They're as close to me as brothers. I hear from them all the time about how proud they are of our program. One, just preparing our players to be ready to play.

And, quite frankly, it's not by accident necessarily that it's so hard for us. We train them for hard and embrace it. If you looked at the history of how we've gotten here, it's been through just a war against Fresno State and then another war against Irvine and then Texas State. It's just been time after time that it's been really hard for us to get to the next level.

But they're used to it, so I just try to get them to embrace that and look forward to it and don't back away and be afraid of it.

We got it again this year, and they answered the bell for that as well.

**Q. Can you just explain what Quinn means to this team and to the program for four years now?**

DAVID ESQUER: Well, one, it makes me a little emotional to think about just his maturity and his growth as a person. I remember saying to his mom even at the end of the season, but what a blessing that we were given that he came back for us his senior year because he could have easily not.

He was ready to move on to pro baseball if that had been his choice. It wasn't right for him. He talks about remembering the role that Brendan Beck and Alex Williams played as seniors and what they gave to the program, what they gave to the pitching staff.

They took the Friday night role, which everyone else got to pitch in a more comfortable role with him coming back. He embraced that, and he has fulfilled every piece of being

that Friday night starter.

But he came to Stanford. He was probably a little quiet, standoff-ish, awkward left-handed pitcher, and now he is the most vocal guy in the dugout supporting his teammates and standing behind them, and he leads by example and plays to win and shows that to the players.

Much like Alex Williams and Brendan Beck, next year's team will take the baton from what he has left.

I always tell them when we leave a place in the dugout or a locker room, I say, "Leave it better than you found it." And he's left our program better than he found it.

**Q. Who is your starter going to be?**

DAVID ESQUER: Good question. I don't know that we've come to that decision quite yet. You know, we're still monitoring Quinn to see physically how he comes off of that. He wants to pitch, and he is pushing, but again, we're looking into his well-being too.

I would be surprised if he didn't, but we are leaving that open based on we're going to make sure that he is physically at his best.

**Q. Who would be second?**

DAVID ESQUER: Joey Dixon would be probably.

**Q. I know you touched on it at the super regional when you were asked about it the day after Quinn's pitching performance the other night, but what -- do you have anything to add to -- you mentioned that people don't know necessarily all that goes into some of these things, that they might not speak with the full knowledge of what's happening. What is it that was going on that made you think that it was okay for him to go that long? And what do you say to, I guess, the critics that they say it's abusive?**

DAVID ESQUER: Yeah, obviously we're looking at someone, what stress pitches they're throwing. He is not cranking off 75% sliders or breaking pitches. He is throwing maybe 80 change-ups during the game, right?

I thought between the change in the fastball that his stress pitches were down. You know, the trainers -- I consult with the trainers if it's smart and the strength coaches. They were on board, and they said: Hey, he is built for this. He is built for, at the end of the year, that you can ask him on one occasion to make a real serious go.

We had monitored him -- or he is probably the only starting



pitcher I've had that we had him in shape that he was able to go 120 pitches every game. To be our Friday starter, he was going to have to do that based on how his pitch counts work. He adapted to that. Instead of going five innings at 100 pitches, he is able to navigate through eight innings at 120.

Sometimes you think about how many pitchers you have held back that you didn't give them a little bit longer leash that they couldn't have been a better pitcher with the finish line being so short. He was resilient. Last year he pitched that role where he would close for us on Friday/Saturday. Whatever pitches he had left on the weekend, we would use on Sunday.

He had nine wins and nine saves. He was resilient. He would always kind of bounce back.

If people watched -- when I walk around the baseball field on a Monday, if I'm just kind of taking a tour of the stadium, I can hear one thing, which is a ball hitting up against our padded fence, and it's Quinn Mathews throwing the day after he pitches.

He talks about that he some days throws because he wants to know what adjustments he has to make when he has some fatigue. He has trained himself to be very resilient, and that was part of the decision.

The other part is he wanted in so bad and was talking a little bit about that's why he came back his senior year was to it have the ball in his hand for this team with the season on the line. You struggle with yourself whether to give him that opportunity or not.

Again, with his safety in mind, it seemed like the right thing to do for him.

**Q. Obviously Quinn is going to be the subject of a lot of the headlines with his performance against Texas and really his performance all season, but your offense has also really picked it up as of late. They've scored fewer than five runs in a game just twice since April 23rd. What do you think might be behind that offensive explosion, and how are you and your staff planning on making sure that it continues here in Omaha?**

DAVID ESQUER: It gets tougher and tougher as you move on in the tournament because you are facing the best of the best pitching staffs. We know that good pitching can stop good hitting a lot of times.

So we've got to be a balanced team. Obviously with Quinn pitching and playing defense and being able to just attack

and game plan. My assistant coaches do such an unbelievable job of preparing our offense, our defense, and everyone. Whether it means having a plan and what's going to give us the best opportunity to face the most elite pitching in the country, you know, I think our guys do a great job preparing and executing the plan.

We've got some talent too. Without a doubt, we have an offense that has some talent. We depend a little bit on the home run, which is hard at Omaha. The double becomes more into play and the low-lying drive is a bigger factor than the home run here at Omaha. Usually. We'll see how this week plays out.

**Q. Last year you talked about the people who didn't get to play that much and how they impacted your program. Who out of that group has kind of stepped up this year?**

DAVID ESQUER: Alberto Rios, for one. A year ago didn't play much at all and has stepped up to be the Player of the Year of the conference.

Then we've had guys like Malcolm Moore who wasn't in our program, but we talk about it to those freshmen. That's why they came to Stanford, is to get the opportunity to play in games like this.

But development across the board. You know, Brandt Pancer has pitched even a bigger role this year than he did a year ago. Joey Dixon has pitched a bigger role this year than he did a year ago.

We count on that. We need those players to develop while they're in our program. We don't -- we're not able to have that quick fix. The portal is a non-player in our program because of the admission standards.

We've got to develop the players from within and have them feed off of the experience. We talk about it all the time. We're here based -- and standing on the shoulders of guys who didn't make it to Omaha.

My first couple of years we had great teams that maybe just fell a little bit short, but talented enough, but the program has just kept advance year, and our guys have taken the baton.

When you lose great players like the Brendan Becks and Kris Bubits and Brock Jones, they leave the program off better than they found it, and our guys know to take it where they left it and run with it and keep it going.

**Q. How have you been able to build such a consistent winner at Stanford?**

DAVID ESQUER: I used to hear all the time when I was a player, you know, Coach Marquess, he used to hear that you couldn't take one of the top three sports between football, basketball, and baseball and win at Stanford. It's too hard. It's too hard to get the quality of athletes that can meet the admissions standards and do that.

He took it as a challenge, and I lived it. I was part of it, winning a national championship at Stanford.

Taking what I knew from Coach Marquess, I knew you could get quality players who could do the academics at Stanford, train them to be good, hard baseball players, train them to embrace kind of the confrontation that the game demands, and just be tough-minded.

We had a lot of players that I played with who I learned from that at Stanford you don't want to give them the stereotypical smart kid that maybe you push around a locker room a little bit. Right? You have to be the anti-- the opposite of that.

We preach that in our program. Hey, we have to be tough-minded. We always talk about people don't want the Stanford kid to be tough. They know you're talented. They know you get good grades. The last thing they want you to be is a tough competitor, so we challenge them to be tough competitors.

**Q. I do want to ask you about the West Coast thing and whether you feel responsible for the whole -- but I want to follow up on the point you made about the admission standards, actually. Do you think there's a way that the NCAA needs to look at this? Because it's not just Stanford, but Wake Forest and Vanderbilt and Northwestern, especially in football, they really can't utilize the portal, neither can Stanford, the way that other schools can. Anybody can leave Stanford and go anywhere.**

DAVID ESQUER: Yeah.

**Q. Not everybody can come. How do you think the NCAA addresses that issue going forward given the fact that you can play right away anywhere you go?**

DAVID ESQUER: I think early on there's going to be that settling period. It's probably hot and it's big right now, much like NIL where it's a big factor in a lot of programs.

Stanford, we're not playing heavy in the NIL. We're just kind of dipping our toe into it and moving slowly, but you see other schools and conferences, they're rushing into it, big promises. And you never know how that's going to

happen once it settles.

I think we're a little bit more reactive right now in trying to see what direction that's going to take. Not that we wouldn't jump in if that's the direction it's going to be forever.

Yeah, it's just difficult with some of the higher academic schools that close their admissions and are a little unyielding, and for good reason, and aren't going to bend in the academic standards.

It's a little bit we're just going to have to deal with it as it is right now and kind of stick by our principles on how we do our business. We'll see how that shakes out.

**Q. The West Coast, do you feel --**

DAVID ESQUER: Disappointed. Disappointed to see some very deserving teams, whether it's the Irvines or USCs of the world, not get that opportunity. You talk about what changes need to be made, whether it's the RPI, which is not favorable to the West Coast, and we all see that, but no one is kind of moving to make that change.

It's difficult to see people that say, yeah, we understand the problem, but it doesn't change. Hopefully there's going to be some better metrics that will be a little bit more across the board a little bit more -- I don't know if fair is the right word, but just a little bit more balanced throughout the country.

**Q. Obviously back here in the black uniforms after being eliminated twice in them, but you wore them against Texas. Did a lot of the players kind of aware that that happened and they wanted to wear them, or was that kind of you?**

DAVID ESQUER: I never pick the uniforms. I always think it goes back to when we went to Lubbock, Texas, in the super regional after our first time and Brendan Beck decided that we were going to wear the hottest uniform in the hottest conditions to kind of embrace the environment, embrace that we weren't going to back down from 106 degree weather against the toughest competition you can find.

I think our guys run with that. The blacks are where we try to face our toughest challenges. I also usually let the starting pitcher pick whatever uniform he wants to wear.

**Q. So this is the third straight year back for Stanford, and this is not the first time you've been here as a coach. You were there with Cal, and you were there as a player for Stanford obviously back in the '80s. You**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**might be hoping third time is the charm because the last two times there have been some early eliminations where. What are you keeping the same, and what's different about your approach to this year?**

DAVID ESQUER: Yeah, you always think about what you have done in the past and, God, we were so close that first time, right? We went down to that last pitch. We were up by a run against Vanderbilt. That didn't work out for us.

Last year was a little bit different. We got off on the wrong foot against Arkansas and then played a very good Virginia team -- or Auburn team.

One thing I learned about going to Omaha, in '85 we came here with what I believe was the No. 1 seeded team. I think we were No. 1 in the country for sure. I thought we came in with the attitude that if we play well, we're the No. 1 team in the country, if we play well, we're going to win because we're ranked so high. We lost 17-3 in the opening game to Miami. They ended up winning the tight that year as the 8th seed.

Then in '87 maybe because of my youth in '85 where I looked up to those players ahead of us. In '87 we came in, and I thought we came in with a totally different attitude. It was more like we don't care how we play. It isn't just about playing good.

To be honest with you, we really didn't catch our stride until we had a miracle finish against LSU. We had a grand slam in the bottom of the tenth inning after going down three runs in the top of the tenth. I don't think we caught our stride and played baseball like we had played the whole year until the semifinal.

We played Texas in the semifinal, and we went down 3-0 in the first and were scrapping from behind. Not until then did we really play Stanford -- the type of baseball we had played the whole season.

Sometimes you have to hang around in the tournament, maybe just play okay, and grind out a tough win or somehow get a dominant pitching performance or a lucky break and a miracle win. If you stay in the tournament long enough, you can catch a little momentum and a little fire where your guys can kind of feel normal in the atmosphere.

So one is we try to keep as much of the same. Hey, let's keep doing what we do in the season and trust how we prepare. We're in a different hotel this year. Hopefully that's our lucky break.

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