

2023 Men's College World Series

Friday, June 16, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

TCU Horned Frogs

Coach Kirk Saarloos

Cole Fontenelle

Kole Klecker

Postgame Press Conference



Oral Roberts - 6, TCU - 5

COACH SAARLOOS: If the first game is any indication of the 2023 College World Series, it's going to be a pretty special one. I thought both teams played extremely well. I thought both starting pitchers did exactly what we thought they were going to do.

And I thought everybody was in character. I thought everybody played exactly the way we've been playing. And you've just got to give credit to Oral Roberts where credit's due. They've done it -- I watched them in the postseason. They've come back. They're a resilient bunch, an old group. And they put a great swing on the ball in the ninth.

But I wouldn't change anything. I thought our guys played with great effort, great grit. It just stinks sometimes somebody's got to lose a game like that. It was two programs, I think, who left it out on the field. And it's baseball.

And we're going to have to come out of the losers' bracket and do it the tough way, which I'll bet on our guys every single time. So congrats again to Oral Roberts.

Q. In the Super Regional, Coach mentioned it took a few minutes to get it underneath you. How did you go out there you looked comfortable?

KOLE KLECKER: I would say there was definitely nerves, obviously for this game, biggest stage. At this point this year, just settled in, kind of went with my routine, what I've been doing all year. And just feel like I started to cruise in from there, got in a good rhythm.

Q. You guys have had your backs against the wall before. People counted you out in April, what do you tell the guys in the locker room to regroup and flush this one?

COLE FONTENELLE: Obviously we've been through worse than this. We've been to a point where we didn't think we were going to make a Regional. For us I think it's just about sticking with our routine, sticking with our process and keep doing what we're doing.

We don't really need to change anything. We're going to come back and we're going to be good.

Q. Cole, RBI single to tie the game, two-run shot to take the lead, bases-loaded walk. Can you just take us through the type of at-bats you had today? It was kind of a different one but they all seemed to be in big situations, big results.

COLE FONTENELLE: It's nothing really changes. It's the same approach every time. It's getting a good pitch to hit and working counts and trying to lay off -- this guy had good stuff today -- trying to lay off his stuff that he was trying to get us to chase.

That was going to be my approach and, I mean, throughout the whole game, the situation, you've got to take it -- you've got to take a deep breath no matter what it is and try to focus on your job. That's what I was trying to do.

Q. Seemed like you guys were -- it was hard to come by this game but seemed like you started to snatch some of it. When you look back, how costly do you feel getting thrown out on bases were to kind of stemming some of your momentum in situations where it felt like you captured it?

COACH SAARLOOS: I don't know how much -- obviously you don't want to do that in terms of making some base-running errors. But I'm not sure how much it affected the momentum of the game.

Q. Just Karson's presence behind the dish, how do you feel the composure he has with the pitching staff



and let alone going into Sunday's game?

COACH SAARLOOS: Karson plays the game of baseball with a pretty slow heartbeat. Everything he does, he does with quality. Even his last at-bat he ended up swinging and striking out, but I thought that at-bat was phenomenal.

I think how he's handled our pitching staff, how he receives and throws, blocks everything, that's why he's been invited to Team USA, the Collegiate National Team that's coming up later on. I think the country has seen what a special kid and special talent he is.

Q. What do you tell the guys? You said you've got to do it the hard way now. What do you tell them to keep their heads up and momentum going the right way?

COACH SAARLOOS: It was a great college baseball game. It just sucks that we lost. And I thought the effort, the grit, the determination, everything, they played the exact same way. It just didn't go our way today. And this season hasn't been easy the whole season. And so why not make it harder on ourselves now?

And there's so much investment and sweat, blood and tears in that dugout that they're champing at the bit to get back on Sunday and get this taste out of their mouth.

But there's nothing to hang your head about. Out on the mound, talking to Luke Savage, you run off this mound with your head up. You have nothing to hang your head about because we're not here if it's not for you.

Guy put a great swing on a baseball hit a three-run homer. It's tough. It's tough to swallow. But we'll wash it. We'll flush it. And the sun's going to come up tomorrow. And we're going to have a good practice. We're going to go do an event here locally with the team and kind of get away from baseball a little bit. And then we'll get back locked in on Sunday to whoever we're going to play.

And the great thing about our team is I think their resiliency and their ability to overcome hard times. They've done it. They have the whole year. I'm not worried about that one second. I just want them to understand that the sun's going to come up tomorrow and we're going to be ready to play.

Q. Ben Abeldt in the sixth inning took over with a guy on and was able to limit the damage a bit but also gave up a home run. Could you talk about what he did well and also what he might have done not so well?

COACH SAARLOOS: He struck out Jonah Cox, who he literally gets hits every game, in a big situation. He threw a

really good slider to Jonah, got him out. And got Hogan out. And almost wiggled his way out of that without giving up a run.

And we were going fastball in and he's got a low-arm slot. The ball kind of took off on him. And it ended up being a little bit up and away. And the McCroskey kid did a really good job at that time. I looked up as the ball was going, I looked up at the flags and they had switched. I think earlier in the game that ball doesn't go out. And they kind of switched and they were blowing from center field to right field.

And as soon as I saw that as the ball was carrying and saw Austin's back, I knew it was going to be a home run.

But again it wouldn't change anything. I thought Ben did a phenomenal job. I thought Savage, just a couple of bad-luck hits here and there.

It's a tough way to go. Those two guys, I hope, don't take this on their shoulders because it's a team game and it's something that, again, we're not here if it's not for the Ben Abeldts and the Luke Savages. And they'll be back. We'll be ready to go on Sunday and they'll be ready to pitch again.

Q. Can you expand on the Cole's at-bats today, especially in the eighth when they didn't want to pitch to Brayden. Then he comes up and draws the bases loaded walk and gets you the lead?

COACH SAARLOOS: That's what we hoped Cole was going to be this year for us, somebody that could protect Brayden Taylor. He's done a really good job of that. And being able to -- it's hard to do sometimes because that's going to happen where they're going to walk the guy ahead of you to get to you.

He's been ready for that opportunity every single time. He may not get it done, but he's been ready for it. And obviously the home run to start the game and then the walk and the base hit in the 4 hole. It's what Cole's done this year. And you need that to have somebody after Brayden. I thought Brayden's at-bat in the ninth inning was awesome. Hit it on the button. Just didn't find any grass. So the fight in our team to get kicked in the gut with a four-run ninth to go down by one and then to put the tying and winning run like we did on base and have a great at-bat by Karson even though he struck occupant followed by a great at-bat by Brayden Taylor even though he didn't get a hit. We're talking about the process all the time. And the results are what everybody remembers and thinks about, but at the same time those are really good at-bats. We just didn't come out on the right end.

