

2023 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Wake Forest Demon Deacons

Coach Tom Walter

Rhett Lowder

Danny Corona

Brock Wilken

Postgame Press Conference

Wake Forest - 3, Stanford - 2

COACH WALTER: We've had some excitement in these three games so far in this tournament. It's a great win for our team. I'm just really proud of our guys. I told them after the game, if you're going to have a chance to win this game, you'll probably have to win a game where you don't play really well.

I felt we were tight early and nervous and kind of got out of our plan offensively. Didn't have great at-bats, really, for the first seven innings.

And give credit to the Stanford pitching. Dixon and Dowd did a great job and kind of held us at bay. But did just enough.

Rhett Lowder didn't have his great stuff. He's been battling a little virus the last couple of days and didn't have his good stuff. But he pitched into the sixth and gave us a chance to win like he always does. And I was really proud of the way he battled.

Obviously Brock getting us on the board with the big homer on the 3-1 pitch in the second. And Danny Corona, what can I say about his at-bat, other than just clutch in that situation?

I thought it was a great timeout by Billy Cilento, kind of pulled Danny down there, kind of calmed the moment down, get him back on top half of the ball and get him in the middle of the field there.

And then our bullpen, Sully and Keener did what they've



done all year. And Cam comes in and makes pitch after pitch and we get the double play ball to win it. And great team win. Proud of the guys.

Q. What did the rain delay maybe do to clear some minds and reset you guys for the push there late?

RHETT LOWDER: I think we always have this saying that anything that goes wrong or anything we just stay good. We were all just staying good when that happens. It gave us a chance to reset.

And we said in the locker room whoever wins the rain delay is probably going to come out on top. I think we got back focused and got some energy going, and I think that worked in our favor. I think we won the rain delay.

BROCK WILKEN: Rhett said it well. We call ourselves the king of delay. Every time we have a delay we come out with so much energy, and our vibe is immediately switched.

For us to come out there like that, probably something that wasn't expected from the other side. And that's what great teams do during delays.

DANNY CORONA: I was going to say we got to get loose, play some card games, play some hacky sack. Got the music bumping. It got us right.

Q. Rhett, in those early innings where, especially in the first where it wasn't coming easy, what were you seeing and feeling while you were out on the mound?

RHETT LOWDER: I kind of just had to slow the game down. It was speeding up on me a little bit. Just had to keep making pitch after pitch. Nothing crazy.

I feel like I've been in some situations like that before where I don't have my stuff. I kind of have to find a way to get outs and keep us in the game. Nothing too crazy.

Q. Danny, what were you seeing on the pitch you drove up through the middle? What kind of guidance did you get from Coach Cilento?

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DANNY CORONA: Earlier in the at-bat when I chased out of the zone, I was looking for something up. I told Billy that. He told me with that pitcher I should be looking down. So once I saw it go down in the zone, I was just looking for something to drive up the middle.

Q. Not that history is big on your radar right now, but you just won a game, and Wake Forest hasn't done that in 68 years here. Is there meaning or satisfaction to that?

BROCK WILKEN: There definitely is. It means a lot for us to, one, be here, and, two, to win a game. Not too many people get to be in this situation. We're super grateful for the opportunity to even come here and get to play on this field with a bunch of great other talent surrounded -- behind us.

But history is not on our radar screen. We're looking forward to the next day we play and the future.

RHETT LOWDER: Brock kind of covered it all. I'm just thinking any win in Omaha is a good day. So doesn't really matter what history says.

DANNY CORONA: They hit it on the nail.

Q. Brock, how does it feel to break J.D. Drew's record set from 1997 when he was at FSU, and now you're on top of the Atlantic Coast Conference home run record?

BROCK WILKEN: It's pretty special. First off I wouldn't be able to do it without these guys next to me. They've given me all the confidence in the world. Over the past three years they've surrounded me with love and confidence to be able to go out there and be me.

So I'm very grateful for these guys and just allowing me to go out there and put this uniform on every day. It's super special. Never thought I'd be able to be in this situation. Those words are kind of crazy to hear. But job's not done. We've got a couple more ball games to win.

Q. Brock, you had the walk in the last inning. What were you seeing with your approach there? You obviously let up a few close ones.

BROCK WILKEN: That was a really good pitcher. I was trying to see something down in the zone, like Danny said, try to see something down. He was kind of living up and kind of scattering it.

I knew I had to see the right pitch, see the right pitch at the right time. He threw a couple of good pitches that I just

missed. And just tried to get on base and pass it to J.J. to do his job. And J.J. did his job and Danny does his job and wins us the game.

Q. You outscored your opponents by 59 runs combined in the Regional, Super Regional. Fell behind for the first time the entire tournament today. Did the pressure start to pile on this? How did you approach and dig out of that?

DANNY CORONA: I don't think the pressure got to us. I think we missed some opportunities. They made some nice plays. We knew our time would come later on in the game. Just don't let it get to you.

BROCK WILKEN: We didn't press too much. There were definitely times you could see us tense up a little bit. I think the rain delay helped us. It was at the right moment, the right time to get us back in our groove.

Right after that you saw our bats start to get much better. We started grinding at-bats and seeing much better pitches to swing at. And from then on we knew the game was in our hands.

Q. Danny, you started the year in the lineup, were out of the lineup for a while there. You've come back, 19 RBIs in the last five games is the count I had. What led you to the process to where you're swinging the hot bat?

DANNY CORONA: I think just sticking to my approach, trying not to chase too much out of the zone and knowing what pitches I could drive.

Q. Danny, I know you're a Baylor alum and so is Nick Kurtz. How special was that moment for you to have plate him to put you guys on top?

DANNY CORONA: It was a very special moment. Nick and I would joke about it our junior year in high school: Can't wait to be in Omaha. And since we've been here it's been nothing but the best. It's been a crazy experience.

Q. You have done it with the long ball all year long. But how huge was the small-ball stuff, that big-time sacrifice bunt from Justin Johnson, showing everybody in the tournament you guys can win games in a lot of different ways?

BROCK WILKEN: That just shows you how versatile we are. We can beat you in so many different ways. When we need to get the job done, we're going to do the job. No matter who it is in our lineup, whether it's a bunt or a long ball or it's a laser up the middle, whatever it may be, we

have so many ways that we can win.

DANNY CORONA: I think during BP we saw the wind was blowing in. It wasn't as easy to hit it out of the yard today. I mean, Brock obviously did it. But I think going into the game, we knew we had to stay hard and low, like Coach says, and it worked out.

Q. When the kings of the delay are in the locker room for 90 minutes, what are you hoping they do? Did you want them to think about the game? Do you want them to hear wild card games and hear loud music, what goes on there?

COACH WALTER: We spent the first five minutes just talking about some situational things and what we needed to do when we came out of the delay. And then at the end of that, we just talked about winning the delay; let's win the delay. Let's have better energy than them coming out of this. And whatever you need to do to cool down, relax, hydrate, because again we didn't know if it was going to be 30 minutes or two hours. So it's just kind of one of those things that we're on notice and just catch your breath and let's get back to work.

Q. What was the moment when -- or kind of when did you tell Seth Keener you were going to go to him?

COACH WALTER: When it went to that second delay. So if it had just gone the first 30 minutes, we would have gone back to Sully and Sully was ready to go. But once it got beyond that, we just didn't feel good about Sully there. We looked at the matchup sheet. We considered Roland. He was a good matchup for the hitters they had coming up. I considered Massey. He was not quite as good a matchup.

Will Craig was the first to mention, he was like, what about Keener? The more we looked at who was coming up in the matchups, the more Keener really made sense. Again, if he's going to start on Wednesday for us, or whenever we play after this one, it's good to get him out there, let him get his feet wet before his start.

Q. Going to what I asked Danny, what's been his process to kind of keep him engaged when he wasn't in the lineup as much, and what have you seen from him the last two to three weeks?

COACH WALTER: It's kind of an interesting case study because as soon as -- Danny spent a better part of the year kind of maybe feeling a little sorry for himself, quite honestly. Once he got past that and just got back to work -- because we know he can hit. We knew our best lineup would be with him in it. But we had to get him past that. We had to get him past himself and get him out of his own

way. And as soon as he really made that mental flip, he's been our guy. And again, he came up to me and thanked me for leaving him in against that lefty. I was like, man, we wanted you in there; I wouldn't want anyone else in there. You're our guy right now and you earned that at-bat. Proud of himself.

Q. Getting past feeling sorry for himself, more tough love or more loving him up?

COACH WALTER: It was a little bit of both, a little bit of tough love and a little bit of loving him up. And mostly it was you need to make a decision, you need to decide what you want out of this season and what you want out of your career. If you want to play Major League Baseball, it's going to be hard along the way. You've got to be able to kind of push through that and persevere. Again, he's done that. And again, he's going to be our guy the rest of the year.

Q. With Sean Sullivan coming in there and getting two pickoffs, what did you see from his decision-making, his execution there, and how big in your mind were those moments?

COACH WALTER: They were huge. First of all, they saved his pitch count so Sully will be available on Monday, which is great. And obviously saved potential runs as well. I give credit to Moose. Those calls come from the dugout, and Corey Muscara, Stanford likes to vault at first base.

We have a catcher control pick where the catcher drops his glove and he just waits for the guy to vault and drops his glove. And Bennett Lee -- Moose called it perfectly and Bennett Lee executed perfectly.

Q. What did you think of the way you guys responded defensively? I know it was quick. You had the error with one out in the top of the ninth. That's the type of thing, in that situation, in this field, this tournament could have gotten away from a team, but instead they stayed with it, got the big double play to get out of it.

COACH WALTER: I was proud of the way that Cam threw the ball. There were a couple of pitches that I thought could have went his way and didn't, and he didn't let it faze him at all. Then there was that error behind that. Didn't faze him at all, makes a good breaking ball on a good hitter and we get into it.

Anytime we feel like the ball's hit to J.J. or Marek we're going to get out. So the person who made the difference was Cam Minacci, because he didn't get ruffled at all, he just kept making pitches.

Q. What's the added value in winning the way you did when you only led only five or ten minutes of the game as opposed to your postseason path to this point?

COACH WALTER: You have to win games in different ways. The first two runs we gave up were kind of free 90s -- we had a walk and a hit-by-pitch that led to the first run. We had a balk that led to the second run.

Probably played a little too deep early in the game. We didn't make that adjustment soon enough. And that's on me, not to get our outfielders in a little more. We probably should have made that adjustment in the second. So we had some things go against us.

And then we could have done a better job and it cost us the first two runs. But again, our pitching staff did what it does, it keeps us in games, gives us a chance to win and there were opportunities for Stanford to spread the lead. And if they get it to 4-1 or 5-1, it's a totally different ball game.

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