

2023 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Brayden Jobert

Paul Skenes

Gavin Dugas

Postgame Press Conference

LSU - 6, Tennessee - 3

COACH JOHNSON: Great night tonight. Unbelievable crowd. I think two things really stand out. Our team was locked in from the first pitch. We talked a lot about just focusing on execution. And they did that really, really well.

This time of year you win these games against these elite teams when great players play great. And that was certainly the case with Paul from the mound tonight, Brayden and Gavin from the batter's box.

I thought it was a solid game. Thought we played solid baseball and our guys were guys. That's what it takes to win games here.

Q. Paul, Tony said he felt you pitched backwards against Tennessee versus the last time they saw you. What was your game plan? What pitches were working?

PAUL SKENES: At different points today I had all four pitches working. I mean, you have to look at obviously their lineup but also what's working for me. And went out there and made pitches, kind of threw what they weren't expecting at times and it worked pretty well.

Q. Paul, can you talk just a little bit about the night? That setting, 25,000 fans, throwing the way that you did, that experience, what it was like.

PAUL SKENES: It was awesome. And I think I'm going to need a little bit of time to kind of internalize that and take it all in. So I don't think I was able to do that as much as



probably some other people were tonight.

But it was an awesome experience to go out there and compete in front of that many people. Alex Box Stadium is a cool place, but this is a different (indiscernible). It was really cool.

Q. Gavin and Brayden, the hitters tonight you guys seemed to really paced yourself. And it just really looked like you guys just did a good job of moving the offense when you needed to. Just how would you assess what you guys were able to do out there tonight?

GAVIN DUGAS: We had a plan. I think we really stuck to it. We hit a lot of balls hard at people in the beginning. It kind of showed you how we came out.

But at the end of the day we had a plan and I think we did a really good job of doing that as well as adjusting to the pitchers that came in the game. We were really locked in as a team.

BRAYDEN JOBERT: I agree with him. We were just focused on the plan that we had before the game and slowing ourselves down, not getting too anxious, because you know it's an unbelievable environment -- 20-something thousand people there. So just taking our breaths and focusing on our job.

Q. Brayden, in Round Rock you reflected a lot about your improvement from last year to this year and the huge game, this much, much bigger stage. But this moment, this game for you, this performance tonight, and all the hard work, is it worth it?

BRAYDEN JOBERT: Absolutely. You know, this is what you play for, to come and play on this stage. And I'm very proud of my team. Very proud of Paul and very proud of Gavin. We all worked really, really hard. And it's for these moments. So I'm just happy to be a part of it.

Q. Paul, you hit your 200th strikeout of the season today, just two shy of the SEC record. Did you have that in mind at all in your outing tonight?



PAUL SKENES: Not really. Found out about that after the game, which is really cool. But, I mean, it comes down to executing. And I think I did a good job of that today, especially early on.

And so it's really cool to do that. But just a lot more happy with the execution, I think.

Q. Your feelings now that you kind of broke the seal on this thing and maybe took some of the mystique away from the College World Series? Having success early, how much did that help you, Gavin and Brayden?

GAVIN DUGAS: It was awesome. I've been waiting a long couple of days since we've been in the hotel, everybody else has. It was awesome to see the environment and take it all, that first pitch of the game. It's everything you could expect and more.

Coach always told us whenever we won the Super Regional that it would be everything we would expect times four. He was right about it, and I'd say times 10. It was awesome to enjoy that first game. We're ready for the next one.

BRAYDEN JOBERT: Like I said earlier, we were just focused on slowing ourselves down because it's such a big environment, such a big stage. But it was as unbelievable as everything that I thought it would be. And it was just awesome.

Q. Brayden, you had three extra-base hits tonight. What were you seeing from the plate?

BRAYDEN JOBERT: I was just trying to get the ball up, stay at the bottom of the zone. That was something that I needed to improve from last weekend. And that was the focus in BP and all the training going into this week.

So just sticking to my plan. Following what our coaches tell us, and it worked out positive for me.

Q. Gavin, can you talk us through that at-bat with that home run, what you were looking for and what you saw?

GAVIN DUGAS: Like Brayden said, just trying to get something up. Our game plan was to get balls up with the guy. He had a lot of sink, a lot of run. The only way to be successful was to see him over the plate, and fortunately I was able to spit on two balls and see one ball up. And I was lucky enough to put a good swing on a good ball and put the Tigers up front right there.

Q. For a lot of you guys first time to play in front of 20,000 fans in Omaha. How do you handle the nerves?

PAUL SKENES: I mean, this is something that we look forward to all year. This is why I came to LSU. But honestly, playing in front of as many fans as we have at Alex Box, and kind of mentally preparing over the last 10 months or whatever it's been, when it comes down to it it just comes down to execution.

And Coach says the game doesn't change, people change. As long as we make it to where we don't change, then that allows to us have success here.

BRAYDEN JOBERT: We like to embrace it no matter how many fans are in the stands. At Alex Box we average probably nine to 10,000 a game. It's the only place in the country that's like that.

I wouldn't say we're used to playing in front of 20,000 people, but we play in front of crowds a lot.

So, it's just super cool. And if you just look around and have a full-circle moment, it's like how can you not have the most fun, you know? It's just go out there, have fun, embrace the opportunity that we're given.

GAVIN DUGAS: To go along with that, I'd say we play 56 games in the regular season and we play 56 playoff games in our mind. So every game we play is a playoff game, no matter what we do and how we're preparing, we're preparing to play a playoff game.

That's something that has made us very successful in those moments. And it's what's going to help us continue to move forward.

Q. Paul, what advice would you give to kids facing a pitcher like you?

PAUL SKENES: Oh man. Be ready for the fastball. I don't know what else to say.

BRAYDEN JOBERT: That's pretty much it. That's all you can do.

Q. You've been around here long enough to know there's been really great pitchers who have come here and not done well. What can you say about Paul's performance tonight with all the pressure and attention on him the way that it was?

COACH JOHNSON: I'm really proud of him. I certainly don't take these outings for granted. But that's about the

16th one that we've seen like that. And remarkable.

I'm really proud of him for tonight because he had a lot on his plate here. And all great things with the Dick Howser award. But it took a lot of time and effort -- and what a great honor. He just showed tonight why he was probably the clear-cut winner for that award.

We tried to get him some rest and insulate him as best we could so he could be on track with his preparation because he does that better than anybody else. As good as the performance is, the preparation is even better.

I think what gets lost with him sometimes because his stuff is so amazing, the pitch execution is tremendous. And when you put that kind of stuff with that kind of execution, you have Paul Skenes.

Q. I know Paul's had great outings the whole season, but what do you think has been, what was the difference between the last time he faced this lineup to this time?

COACH JOHNSON: We kind of did a hybrid thing of look back at those games. Then we looked back on where they were recently. And some of those guys have improved. And we felt like we needed to attack them a little bit different way.

And then looking at it also, their plan early in the game, we were able to kind of figure out what they were trying to do with him. And then Wes did a nice job of calling pitches. And then the big man took care of the rest as far as the execution.

Q. Just the selection, you were talking about the execution, but the selection to keep them off balance and the change, working early, do you feel like that really was the tone-setter?

COACH JOHNSON: For sure. They were on fastballs the first inning. They had a hit -- Ensley had a hit and then Dickey lined out. And so Ahuna swung early. You could tell they were trying to jump him. Sometimes that's all you could do.

When it's getting on you that fast you have to make an early decision. When you have to make an early decision and he starts throwing his changeup like that, there's not a lot you can do. The execution of all three tonight was pretty elite.

Q. The job Josh Pearson did in left field, made a few nice catches for you.

COACH JOHNSON: Yes, spectacular. Tonight was very reminiscent of -- we started this season at Texas A&M, started league play at Texas A&M. A bigger field, the wind was blowing in.

We played him because I think he gives us professional at-bats and he's a pretty good defensive outfielder and that paid off. He's obviously earned his spot in there with how he's performed throughout the postseason.

But left field here is a really tough place to play at the 6:00 o'clock game. The sun sits right over there. And we actually had to warn him about it.

We were here in '21. We hit a double over the left fielder's head and then we misplayed a ball in the first inning. It's really tough, and he did a nice job.

And Mark Wanaka, I've said this before, is the best positioner of outfielders on the planet. And he did a great job of that tonight. They hit a couple right at Dylan and right at Josh.

Q. We've talked a lot about Paul Skenes tonight, but what about the job Riley Cooper did coming in and closing this thing out, especially after it got a little hairy in the eighth?

COACH JOHNSON: Poise, competitiveness, winner, and all of the above. And he's been at his best here basically since the SEC Tournament.

That's like four or five really good outings in a row. And the tempo was amazing. It was like, get the ball back on the rubber, strike one. It was really impressive. And like I said, sometimes it's not about spin rates, it's not about velocity, it's about winning pitching, and Riley is doing a lot of winning pitching right now.

Q. Is he comfortable in this experience?

COACH JOHNSON: I think so. I felt that way the whole NCAA Tournament and certainly tonight.

Q. So far all the other three games so far this weekend have been won in the last two innings. What words did you have to Riley Cooper when he went in to close?

COACH JOHNSON: We actually talked about that. It's three one-run games in the previous three. And you never know when those big pitches are going to come that are going to tip the game.

So a lot of boring stay-in-the-moment, present moment-focused type stuff and try to win as many innings

as we could. And all those runs, taking it from 2-0 to 4-0 and then from 4-0 to 5-0 on Tre's sac fly and then Brayden's home run, that proved to be a really big deal.

But for him, it was just about execution. He came in after the home run and there were two outs in inning. So it was really just about getting that first guy out. And we did, infield single. Nice try on that play by Jordan right there with the guy running down the line.

But then to strike out Christian Moore, who had a phenomenal season, one of the best players in the SEC, hands down, for me. But he made it really tough on him with how he executed.

And then he was pumped up after that one. I just kind of looked at Wes and it was like, hey, get him settled back down because we've got to go out and get three more outs.

But you know what you're going to get with him. That's the best thing I'll say about him. You know what you're going to get from Riley.

Q. I was curious, with Brayden, how much do you think that offseason surgery has helped him to see the ball and hit it more consistently this year?

COACH JOHNSON: He's done a great job. In every phase -- last year's evaluation, there was areas we needed marked improvement. We've talked about those things, athleticism, defense, vision, play discipline, at-bats between homers. He's literally done all that.

You win games this time of year when guys like him step up and play their best, game-winning homer against Oregon State and that 1-0 game of the Regional was obviously big. And three great at-bats tonight.

When I look up, because we're looking at him in the face from the third base dugout, just the self-control and locked in and he was a professional hitter tonight.

Q. Talk about the offense. Obviously you guys have seen a lot of top tier pitchers, but you always seem to find a way to figure them out, Gavin getting it going, and Brayden as you alluded to, but what is it about those guys, is it just their ability to stay in the moment, kind of work through the problem?

COACH JOHNSON: Good pitching beats good hitting. Baseball has always been that way. We have a great offense. I think 1 to 9, you have a lot of things working for you right now. There's some speed. There's some power, obviously. Solid hitting skills throughout. But you've got a ton of college at-bats in there.

And they've been useful. And what I mean by that is they all weren't exactly what they are now but they hold themselves to a high standard of what the team needs out of them. And then they just don't give in the way a lot of typical college hitters do.

When you do that, you get to some of the talent in terms of on-base percentage and slugging, runs, all of those types of things. I thought we played very mature baseball tonight.

We got the one error. That was a tough play. Jordan did everything right on that play to come get it. The only hop he could have caught was the short hop and still made the play.

I thought we played great, clean baseball on both sides. Took really good at-bats, and then we had some, like I said, some of our guys were guys tonight.

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