

2023 Men's College World Series

Monday, June 19, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Stanford Cardinal

Coach David Esquer

Alberto Rios

Drew Dowd

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee - 6, Stanford - 4

COACH ESQUER: I love being here. This is my least favorite press conference of the year. But, God, just so proud and just so blessed to have coached this team.

We'll have a number of players that will move on, whether it's seniors or juniors who will get drafted and won't return to the program. Boy, what a mark they left on our program.

Been to the World Series for three straight years. Our program as a whole, we've hosted a Regional for six straight years. Been to four straight Super Regionals. We've got some guys who have some history, some track record. They've left our program a better place than they found it.

I usually challenge them when we go to an opposing park, whether it's their dugout or locker room, I always challenge them to leave it better than we found it. They took it to heart as far as what they did for our program.

So I've got nothing but pride. It's my alma mater. It's my school. It's a place where I played and won a national title.

And I'm just even more satisfied at the brotherhood they've created amongst each other. You can see the emotion at the end of the day that it's hard to say goodbye. And I always tell them we're going to say farewell, we're not going to say goodbye.

But even that's hard. And you want to let them experience that pain a little bit because of just how deeply they feel for each other.

Today's game, obviously it started out well for us taking a



lead early but Chase Burns came in there and just slammed the door on us and made it really difficult for us, didn't give us any cracks. We were going to have to do something special there against him.

And then just trying to hold onto that lead became more difficult. They did a nice job. They got the double in the seventh inning and they were able to get contact and a wild pitch to score.

But Chase was going to make it real difficult for us to score. We were going to probably have to get him out of there somehow and run his pitch count up and maybe even playing 10 or 11 innings.

But hats off to him because that was an all-time performance at the College World Series.

But, hey, again, my club, I had the player of the year of the conference. I had the pitcher of the year of the conference for the third straight year. We won the league by five games, which no one usually does in our league.

So there's nothing that could tarnish our season. There's nothing. You could say you came here and lost in two straight -- not going to do it. It's not going to make me feel less than this was a special year for this group.

We competed really hard. We played against the No. 1 team in the country and fought hard today. And to be quite honest we're capable of winning national title if things fall right for us. They just didn't. That's baseball.

Unfortunately for seven of the eight teams it's not going to fall right for.

A tough inning for us, for sure. But there's nothing but pride for me as a head coach. And I love these guys, and I say that easily and freely because that's a big part of our program is the relationships we build with our players.

And you see the emotions the relationships they build with each other. And that was my number one goal is when we won a title in '87 -- and I've got a hundred texts from my teammates in '87 right now and throughout the tournament



-- those guys are my brothers. That's my family.

And my hope was to deliver the same experience that I had that they would be able to feel for their teammates the same way I felt for mine.

And then I would take my chances on winning as many baseball games as possible if I could develop that in the locker room. We have and it's been pretty special for a number of years now that the players who remain in our program have to take that baton and just carry it.

We're going to come here and have a celebration at some point and it will be on the shoulders of these alumni the past three years who have brought us here, where we can just learn and just normalize our experience here.

But it will happen. And it will be fun to call the Drew Dowds and Alberto Rioses of the world and say we're here because of you, what you did for our program, and you're going to celebrate it with us as much as anyone else.

What I feel from the alumni reaching out, they've got nothing but great feelings for this team and our program and how it represents our school. And I'm right there with them.

Q. Alberto, what was Chase doing? You got a hit off him, had a little success. But what were the other guys on the bench saying? What was the key to keep you guys down those few innings?

ALBERTO RIOS: I think for the most part he made his pitch when he wanted to. He made some really good pitches. He made sure he had us thrown off in between counts and stuff like that.

We were putting our swing off on him. His stuff was just working really well. That's baseball sometimes -- you'll swing and miss sometimes, you'll get a hit sometimes. It's exactly what happened.

Q. Alberto, obviously Pac-12 Player of the Year, an incredible season. If this was it for you, what's it meant to be a Stanford Cardinal?

ALBERTO RIOS: This place has turned me into a man, has given me best friends for the rest of my life. Has given me the opportunity to express myself for the player and the person I am. And I owe this place everything.

To the head coach and staff, to the players, to the staff, this place is insanely special, and that's an understatement. I think to compete at the highest level and to go to the school that we go to, I think it's a blessing. And

it's beyond any words that I can comprehend.

And this place is second to none in everything. And it shows with our guys, our coaching staff and what this place has done for me -- and what it's done for me, it's given me everything.

Q. Drew, what can you say about the way Quinn battled today after what he's already given you guys this season? And did that make you more eager to come in and pick him up?

DREW DOWD: Quinn's bailed us out all year. Just him coming back in the first place was a statement in itself. But it couldn't have been more extra motivation for me. When I took the ball I said, you picked us up enough this year; I've got you right here.

Today it wasn't easy for him. I don't think he had his best stuff, but he battled. Just didn't go his way, that fifth inning.

At the same time, we wouldn't be here without him. We wouldn't be close to here without him. So that was the least I could do for him, for what he's done for us.

Q. Alberto, if I could ask you about Burns and facing him and how that changed, obviously you guys got to his starter. He came in and it was difficult. What made him so hard and how did that change things?

ALBERTO RIOS: I think him as opposed to the starting pitcher, Dollander-- he was just making his pitches. He had everything working for him, whether it was fastball, slider changeup. He was making his pitches whenever he wanted to compared to the previous guy that we got to.

I think when he needed his one, he got it. And it's not easy when you're facing 100 with that kind of slider and stuff. I know he's a good pitcher.

We tried to do the best we could. Sometimes it doesn't go our way. I think that's exactly what happened.

Q. Alberto, talk about, were you surprised they tried to score on you in that first inning? How did you feel about the throw you made?

ALBERTO RIOS: I loved it. Do it. I'll throw you out. That's exactly how I felt. I forget what inning it was, but the close one, I feel if I put a better throw on it it could have gone the other way too. I know my abilities and stuff.

COACH ESQUER: We were inches away from that in the fifth inning of there being zero runs scored. Alberto makes that great throw, and we're bang, bang at the plate and

runs scored.

Q. Going into the fifth, how much did it feel like Quinn had sort of turned a corner? He retired eight in a row; five of those eight were strikeouts. Seemed to really have them off balance. What sort of changed in the fifth, do you think?

COACH ESQUER: They just had some really good, tough two-strike at-bats. When they were fouling off pitches -- and as you foul off pitches you're take a little steam. Even if they go down, they're taking him down a little bit with him.

And I just think they were able to foul off a few more pitches and stay in the at-bat. And they had some really good two-strike contact up the middle. They made it really tough.

We felt we owed it to Quinn to let him be in there as long as we could, and he wanted that last batter. And he's earned it. And we very easily could have gone out of there with zero, one, two, three or four, it seemed like. Every at-bat, they were tacking on another hit in a really tough at-bat.

But it's baseball. Like he said, Alberto throws that ball maybe a little lower, we get to the plate a little quicker, they don't get anything that inning. But that's baseball.

And they had some really tough at-bats against Quinn. And of course, like I said, Burns came in and just threw up a wall there. And the guy's reaching triple digits every now and then and landing a slider. I don't think baseball gets any tougher than that. As good as we are, that's pretty high-level baseball that we were battling.

And, again, hats off to him because that was just a tremendous pitching performance.

Q. Is there any sort of historical comp you could throw on Burns? Maybe not just in terms of the stuff, but I'll take that as well, but in terms of the way he changes the tenor of a game when he comes in.

COACH ESQUER: That's a good question. A guy that comes in when the momentum is the other way. It's a 4-0 lead and just kind of shut it down and didn't really give us any crack.

I mean, I think Alberto got a hit off of him. I'm not sure how many hits he gave up. He only gave up two hits, right? With nine punch-outs. He made it tough. He didn't walk anybody. So he wasn't giving us anything.

And the two runs they score, I think they scored both runs

were one hit batter and a walk, I believe. Eventually when they did score -- actually they hit a double, then a ground ball.

We got beat by execution. They achieved and made it hard on us. And the double and then just contact and then a wild pitch was how the two runs they got ahead of him scored. We'll probably have to stalemate it a little bit if we were to get to him eventually.

Q. You did talk about, just a little bit ago, about losing some of the guys. You'll lose some guy but when you come back to Omaha next year who are going to be your leaders?

COACH ESQUER: Good question. We've got some guys -- we've had great luck of kids who maybe don't play any role and then all of a sudden step up just by experiencing the program.

But obviously it's going to start with Malcolm Moore and Braden Montgomery. Those two guys will be cornerstones of our team.

We've got kids in the pipeline, just champing at the bit to play. Jimmy Nati sat on the bench, but helped us get here. Temo Becerra got some great experience. And Trevor Haskins, who was our starting shortstop going into the season, but because of the injury and sick just never got healthy enough to play the season. But he's the guy that had the big walk-off a year ago against Texas State. He'll be a year better and year older.

Some of the pitching we'll get back between Nick Dugan and Matt Scott, they'll just be better than they were this year.

We've got a very nice recruiting class coming in with some really good arms. We're going to have to maybe replace some of those home runs that we had this year.

And we'll see how the draft treats us. We expect that we could lose quite a few of our players. But I'm always hopeful that we create a program where if it's not exactly right for them to leave it's a win-win. They feel comfortable coming back. They'll get better. They'll get a year older. They'll maybe make themselves even a better prospect.

And I think that's kind of the measure of my program. If I get some kids that if the draft doesn't work out and they're 100 percent comfortable coming back, that's the program I want to have. I feel like we have that.

Quinn Mathews is an example of that, Brendan Beck, Alex Williams -- those guys didn't balk at coming back for a

senior year because of the program and culture we have.

Maybe we'll get a surprise or two. But I'm just so thankful that the way those players have left our program -- and I'll continue to say they left it better than we found it even though they found it pretty good.

Q. You and a couple of players talked about how close-knit this group is and how much they enjoy playing together. Given that, given the way you lost these two games, having a chance right up to the end in both games, what was postseason what could you say in that session when it was so raw?

COACH ESQUER: You're right, it's raw at the end. And, quite frankly, it should be. And I can understand that. You've got to give them that time to feel the pain of the end of a season and last time to get a chance to play with some of those players.

And they've gone a big battle this year, but from winning the league and the battle it takes to get through a Regional, and then a Super Regional, and the experience being here in Omaha.

Playing at the highest level and going to a school like Stanford and getting that education, but also proving that you could play your sport at the highest level, that will set a standard for their whole life no matter what they do.

It doesn't matter what line of work they go into. But that will mark them as fathers and husbands even after baseball is all said and done with.

That was my experience. So I know getting them here to Omaha and letting them know that they could play baseball at the highest level, they could study and go to a school at the highest level, they could expect that out of themselves.

They will be not only great baseball players at a professional level but great doctors and lawyers and employees for any business that would have them.

And that's what you walk away in the end when you graduate from Stanford and you get a chance to play baseball here. I'm proud to continue that.

Coach Marquess set the standard here at Stanford. And I'm able to take that baton from him. But I've been marked by our program, and I hope that we've done the same thing for everybody in our program.

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