

2023 Men's College World Series

Wednesday, June 21, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Wake Forest Demon Deacons

Coach Tom Walter

Pierce Bennett

Sean Sullivan

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 5, Wake Forest - 2

COACH WALTER: Obviously disappointing loss, but we'll come out ready to play tomorrow like we've done all year. We've responded to adversity all year. And tomorrow will be no different.

Thought Sully threw the ball well, kind of quieted the game down, kind of kept us in it, gave us chances. And we had people on base all day. We were 2-for-17 with runners on base today. And that's going to be hard pressed to win a game with those kind of numbers with people on base.

I had a chance to walk Beloso there with a 2-0 count. I wanted to it. I was in between. I should have pulled the trigger on an intentional walk there and loaded the bases for Thompson.

I regret threw changeup. Seth threw a 2-0 changeup that he just elevated, and Beloso didn't miss it. He's a good hitter. Should have walked him in that situation and it would have been a totally different game had I done that, put a little more pressure on them.

But gotta come out tomorrow and play good baseball.

Q. Sean, you were spectacular tonight, not only being able to save your bullpen going into tomorrow and moving forward as well. Is it something that you can take from a scouting report perspective and talk to the guys who will throw tomorrow, something you saw offensively obviously game plan?

SEAN SULLIVAN: Definitely, I thinking just seeing that order twice was big advantage for us. And I think can give some key tips to other pitchers facing them tomorrow.

Q. Obviously difficult hitting conditions out there with the wind doing what it does here. But you were able to get a couple but what's the key going forward for this team to try to get something going in these conditions?

PIERCE BENNETT: Yeah, it's all about adjusting, especially here -- we usually play a pretty small ball park. The balls that usually go out there aren't going out here.

We just need to adjust on keeping hard and low line drives. It's hard to do. Hitting's hard. You can't really intentionally do that all the time. But just focusing in, zeroing in on just hitting line drives, finding the holes.

I think LSU did a good job of that, keeping it low, making our guys make plays. A lot of our outs were left up in the air.

Good swings, a lot of guys had good swings, just at guys. But things just didn't fall the way we wanted it to.

Q. You made LSU use three pitchers to get you guys out, the first six outs. What do you think stalled out in terms of your offensive momentum that you had early?

PIERCE BENNETT: Credit to their pitchers. They kind of quieted the storm. But we had a lot of situational at-bats to kind of get some runs in, gain some momentum. Maybe get some more pitchers out before they kind of got in their groove.

But, yeah, just runners on third, less than two outs, couldn't get them in a couple of times throughout the game, which I felt like was the difference.

But I mean credit to their pitchers. Slowed it down and they were fighting.

Q. Tomorrow will be the first elimination game you guys have faced the entire NCAA Tournament. I know it's kind of fresh in your minds, but what's the mindset for the team? And what was that, I guess, postgame huddle like?



SEAN SULLIVAN: I think it just goes to show that you don't take any day for granted. Just keep fighting for another day to play with each other. I know that's what it's all about. That's what we want to do.

We'll have to be extra gritty tomorrow, grind out at-bats, just keep working on the mound. Just fight to play one more day with each other.

PIERCE BENNETT: Yeah, I mean, it's just another game. Bottom line, we've been doing it all year. Haven't lost a series all year. Knock on wood on that one.

So, I mean, we've been through it before. It's just another game for us. We're going to come out ready to play.

Q. Your 2 through 5 hitters drew walks, but combined they went 0-for-15 at the plate tonight. What were you seeing in particular from them especially on looking at a lot of pitches?

COACH WALTER: Herring came in threw well. He was kind of effectively wild. He would have big misses then he'd locate. And he's got a good arm. He's got good stuff. We just didn't kind of force him to get in the zone enough and didn't kind of grind and stay inside baseballs as much as we needed to do on a day like this.

I think 18 of our first 21 outs were via either fly ball or strikeout. And when you're playing in these conditions, you've got to keep the ball out of the air. You've got to be hard and low. You can't strike out and you can't hit the ball in the air. And we did both those things today.

Q. You mentioned you almost made an intentional pass on the at-bat that ended up with the three-run homer. Curious, did you ever think about bringing Sean Sullivan in at that point, a lefty-on-lefty matchup to get out of that jam?

COACH WALTER: Sully wasn't quite ready. It was just the third inning of the game, and Seth had thrown really well in the first inning. Second inning didn't throw well but pitched well enough to get out of it.

Again, two walks and first baseman hits a ball kind of bounces over Kurtz's head. It wasn't like he was out there getting barrelled up. It was one of those situations where when he fell behind Beloso, I should have followed my gut instincts and I didn't do that because the next two guys were a good matchup for Seth.

Q. Obviously heart of the order, 3, 4, 5 guys struggled a little bit. Haven't had necessarily loud weeks out

here. Have you noticed any kind of pressing, I hate to use that word, but any of that kind of thing? What do you think you can do to kind of spark something with those guys?

COACH WALTER: I think it can turn quickly. Tommy Hawke pressed a little bit the first two games and obviously every one of his at-bats today was really good. Really happy with the way Tommy set the table all day. I thought Lucas gave us good at-bats.

So clearly we need to get Kurtzy and J.J. going, those two. I might flip the order a little bit and move Pierce up into the 5 hole and maybe kind of give J.J. a little bit of a breather, a little less pressure situations.

But we need J.J. and Kurtz to get going. If we're going to make a run here at this title, we're going to need those two guys to get rolling.

Q. You used two pitchers today. Could you just talk about how big -- even though the outcome isn't the way you wanted it -- how big those guys stepped up for you to save some arms for tomorrow?

COACH WALTER: It was huge. When we're down three we're in between whether to go to Sully or piece it together with some other guys and save Sully for tomorrow. We felt like we'd score.

We had opportunities to score. We had runners on base you but just couldn't get the big hit.

Again, Herring was the difference. Me not walking Beloso and Herring, that was the different in the game today. I don't think he has thrown 80 pitches all game. I don't think he's thrown 80 pitches in a week all year, based on the numbers. And he went out there and gave them 80 really good pitches. He was the difference.

Q. What's it going to be like tomorrow to have Bennett Lee behind the dish let alone what he's been doing with the pitching staff all season and just putting up consistent numbers for the pitching staff let alone for Bennett?

COACH WALTER: He's our guy. He's a leader on this team. And, again, we'll be in a good head space tomorrow. I don't worry about us coming out and playing well or being nervous or the situation being too big for us.

That starts with our leadership group, and Bennett Lee is kind of at the front of that. Pierce Bennett, who you saw here, and Bennett Lee are the two guys at the front of that.

Q. I know it's early, but what is the pitching plan? And will Rhett Lowder be on the board for you tomorrow?

COACH WALTER: That's a good question. I'm not 100 percent sure on Rhett. We'll have to talk to him and see how he feels tomorrow and make a decision on that.

Knowing Rhett he'll probably be on the board tomorrow. But we've got Minacci and Roland and Massey and Ray and Crum and Mascolo. We've certainly got plenty of pieces tomorrow.

Q. Do you expect to see Paul Skenes tomorrow?

COACH WALTER: I do. I do expect to see Paul Skenes tomorrow. He threw before the game today. He was cutting it loose pretty good. I imagine that's exactly who we'll see.

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