

# 2023 Men's College World Series

Wednesday, June 21, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**LSU Tigers**

**Coach Jay Johnson**

**Griffin Herring**

**Riley Cooper**

**Cade Beloso**

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 5, Wake Forest - 2

COACH JOHNSON: Great performance tonight by our team. Thought it was a great team win. Had a little bit of adversity early in the game there, and really responded offensively. In the second inning, we took some really good at-bats.

And big inning obviously there in the third with a great one by Cade.

Really proud of the pitching staff. Everybody contributed tonight. Was big of Javen to get out of the first inning with no runs. We didn't do them any favors offensively in the first, going down on nine pitches and swinging at three or four balls, which was a little out of character. So we made it tough on him in the second.

Blake after giving up the single that was a big out right there with their best hitters coming up, and then obviously what a performance by Griffin to strike out Kurtz, to limit the damage there. And then really settled into the game and got us the length that we needed.

And then Gavin came in and executed incredibly well. And Riley finished off another one. So good performance and we'll turn it over to tomorrow.

**Q. Take us through your home run and the home run pitch itself?**

CADE BELOSO: I was just trying to hit a fly ball to center field, stay out of the double play. Once that passed ball happened, kind of changed my mindset a little bit.

When you have a coach as good as Coach Jay, especially with hitting (indiscernible) the ball at your thigh, you better listen. I got a changeup at my thigh and put a good swing on it and it went over the fence.

**Q. Griffin, what was working for you on the mound tonight?**

GRIFFIN HERRING: I would say the fastball was probably my main pitch tonight. Had good run to it. I think maybe it sank a little bit sometimes. Sometimes it rode. So probably the fastball. Slider got working towards the end.

**Q. Cade, how much has your past and everything you've seen and gone through made you ready for moments when they come up?**

CADE BELOSO: It just kind of puts things into perspective. It's just like the whole concept like behind "have to" versus "get to." You don't have to come through in those moments. Like you get to be in those moments.

That's the thing that puts me at peace, especially like when the game is at its highest and stuff like that. And just in the on-deck circle, try to get yourself as calm as possible, especially when you kind of see the moments coming. But just trying to stay as calm as possible.

**Q. Riley, what do you do to sort of make yourself just, I guess, physically ready for a moment like this after you threw 40 pitches yesterday?**

RILEY COOPER: A lot of water and sleep. I try to sleep as much as I can and I just show up and I feel good.

**Q. Griffin, you hadn't pitched really in two weeks. What do you do to stay ready, to be able to kind of come out and go four and a third and really shut the middle of that game down a little bit?**

GRIFFIN HERRING: We throw weekly bullpens. Coach Wes Johnson, he does a great job with us. Really good catch play. A lot of intent with everything that we're doing.

And pure adrenaline. This place is awesome. I think I kind of was able to feed off the adrenaline instead of letting it get to me, kind of like a steroid shot. Pretty cool.

COACH JOHNSON: We'll make sure the adrenaline is not on the NCAA banned substance list. (Laughter).

**Q. Riley and Griffin, can you talk about Griffin's performance; and, Griffin, could you talk about the big outing from Riley at the end there?**

RILEY COOPER: It was huge. He killed up a lot of innings and threw good. He's been doing that all year. It was really cool to see him do it here on the big stage.

GRIFFIN HERRING: We all knew what he was going to do. He's Coop: comes in, closes it out. Had his fastball working. A lot of ride. That's just what he does.

**Q. Cade, what is it about Riley? Is it just deception? People have seen him enough now but they still can't get to him.**

CADE BELOSO: He just makes things uncomfortable as a hitter. He can throw any pitch on any count for a strike whenever he wants to. In college baseball, it's pretty hard to do.

He throws 90 to 93 miles an hour from the left side, which that's pretty good. And he's really good and he just pounds the zone. So you can't take an at-bat off of him. He never really gets out of control, like sporadic, when he throws the ball. He's always going to compete.

**Q. What does it feel to have guys like Jobert and let alone Crews starting off that inning in the third to set the tone for your at-bat?**

CADE BELOSO: He's the best player in college baseball, and he's on our team. He does what he does. He's one of the most complete players I've ever seen. I watch MLB baseball every day. That speaks measures to him. He always comes through in big moments. He's like our catalyst for the offense. He gets things rolling and just gives the rest of us confidence.

**Q. Griffin, big stage for a true freshman for you. At what point in time when you were on the mound did you feel like you had settled into this game, or was that something you felt in the beginning?**

GRIFFIN HERRING: Honestly, I never did. I was just kind of out there throwing the ball and just looking at Al. That was pretty much it. I never really felt like, yeah, I'm really in this, like, they can't touch me. I was just throwing the

ball. Serious.

CADE BELOSO: This guy's a comedian.

**Q. Is there something about the batter's eye here that just allows you to see the ball a lot better? You've just been taking great hacks during this tournament.**

CADE BELOSO: I mean, it's one of the nicest fields in America, you know. The people, whoever constructed this field, put it all together, did a phenomenal job. You can see the ball good here. They've got bright lights and good bat side.

**Q. Riley and Griffin, there was a stretch during the middle of the year where the bullpen obviously went through some struggles, but down the stretch it's been dramatically better, statistically, especially here in Omaha. What do you guys think has been the biggest difference in the bullpen gelling the way it has?**

GRIFFIN HERRING: I think everybody's just playing for each other. I mean, nobody wants to see that last game, I know for a fact nobody on this staff, nobody in the dugout. And we're all just playing for each other doing everything we can. And the bullpen was always talented. So none of us were ever worried about it.

RILEY COOPER: We just want to win. So we're just doing our part because we always know the hitter's got our back. We thought we should get even with them and win some games.

**Q. Riley and Griffin, just how much is there chatter about throwing strikes, being aggressive because of the way the wind, the way the ballpark plays, is that conscious in your thoughts?**

RILEY COOPER: That's what I'm thinking the whole time. When you have Dylan in center, I have confidence in him catching the ball. I just throw strikes and just let them hit it and stuff and it worked out well.

GRIFFIN HERRING: Just to add to that, Coach Johnson, from the very first day we got here, first practice, said just dominate the white. Not a hitter-friendly park. So just dominate over the plate and you're going to get a lot of outs.

**Q. Your thoughts on one game to win to go to the national championship series.**

CADE BELOSO: It's just another game. We're not going to make it anything bigger than it is. It's the same game we've been playing since February. We're going to go out

there, have fun, we're going to compete to the best of our abilities and let the rest take care of itself. But we're not going to make it some massive thing. Today, everybody knows the scenario. But you don't have to put any more pressure on yourself. Just go out there and have fun.

RILEY COOPER: Yeah, basically what he said. We're just going to play one game at a time like we normally do and just do what we do.

GRIFFIN HERRING: Just one pitch at a time. We've got guys like Dylan Crews, Cade Beloso, Riley Cooper. So I think we're going to play loose, have fun.

**Q. What's the thought process and the conversation involved with Paul Skenes and availability?**

COACH JOHNSON: We'll talk to him tonight. I think it's a day-by-day deal. We have a pre-throw process that we go through with pitchers and their availability and testing and recovery and all of those types of things. So we still need to go through that tomorrow before we make any decision.

**Q. I think if someone were to walk in here not really know what's going on, they wouldn't know these guys are playing elimination games the last two days by just their attitudes. Does that permeate through the entire roster, and why do you think your guys are so loose despite the pressure?**

COACH JOHNSON: I think in the first meeting of the year, every year, one thing I tell them is, 365 days a year we're going to work on mindset. We expect to be here. We expect to be playing important baseball in June.

And we play every game like we're playing important baseball in June. Like, the Tuesday on March 22nd against McNeese is a playoff game to us. And the thought process behind that is if you do that all year long, then you can just stay in character when you get to the postseason.

And that's something that I adopted early on in my career, and I think it's really benefited us in tournament play.

**Q. Yesterday you told us you didn't see Nate Ackenhausen as a Cinderella story. Then you have a guy step up and extend further than he has all season in Griffin Herring. What was working for him and what made you believe he could go as long as he did?**

COACH JOHNSON: I thought he mixed well. I thought he threw all his pitches for strikes. He had great composure. I think he plays older than his age. And I think throughout this season he's pitched in enough high-leverage spots that -- there's a few Fridays in a row, I want to say, we brought

him after Paul to complete Friday three weeks in a row for wins.

I want to say it was Ole Miss, somebody else, Alabama, Kentucky maybe. And he did a great job there. So I thought he would play well or pitch well against their lineup, and he certainly did.

**Q. I guess following up on that, I think your pitching ERA for the postseason is right at a 2.0, something like that. What is it about this staff where it's just kind of flipped for them in these last three weeks that's allowed them to have so much success?**

COACH JOHNSON: I have two thoughts on that. I think, number one, I don't think the season was as bad as people made it out to be. Like, look at our schedule. Like just look back at who we've played.

And then the Southeastern Conference is not friendly as far as the environments that these guys pitch in. Not from a fan standpoint but from the ball -- they're small. I don't have any other way to say it. And you're going to give up some runs in league. And that's every staff in this SEC.

So I think part of it was some of that. I think the best coach that any player's ever going to have in their life is playing time and being through some of that. So when you look back at a couple of speed bumps -- I think about Auburn and Mississippi State -- we didn't want to waste those losses or failure.

And I think we learned a lot of things, both as coaches. We've adjusted some of the preparation things. We've adjusted some of the usage, not just in how what pitches they throw but how we're using guys.

And so I think it's just been a good team effort and I think we've got guys that are good. I think we've evaluated really good with this roster. We feel like we've learned it better as the season's gone along.

Another thought that we talk about early is let's play well enough to win games early in the season so you can be in the NCAA Tournament, but let's figure out our best team as we go.

**Q. Cade Beloso, obviously he's this great story but he's also one of your best hitters. What is it about him that makes him capable of coming up in a moment like that?**

COACH JOHNSON: I was just chuckling inside at one of the questions earlier about doing well here. I was looking down he has 15 home runs and a ton of RBIs. He's had a

great season.

I think he's just worked really hard, which we've well-documented. Worked really hard going into last season and got hurt right before opening day and missed last season. And then doubled up on those efforts.

I mean, literally changed his swing, improved his body a little bit. Really honed in his approach and he's got great hand-eye. He's one of those guys, feels like he was born to hit a line drive somewhere. He has that kind of feel to him.

And that's why he's sitting right where he is in that order because you trust him to come up with guys on base and give you a quality at-bat, and that was a great one today.

**Q. Can you talk about how big the offense came up today in the third inning there?**

COACH JOHNSON: I did not like the first inning. And, again, we're talking about three future Major Leaguers that hit for us in the first inning. But first-pitch out, and then I thought Tommy swung at a ball on strike three, and I thought Tre' swung at a ball on 3-2.

Now, Keener is really good and has deception, like their whole staff does. And then we gave up two. Part of that was the offense's fault for making Javen go out there that quickly after a tough first inning. That's bad baseball.

Then we just gathered it up. It's, like, we actually talked about a scenario where if you lose your plan in the postseason, that this can get away from you and it's over. Just like that.

We had already talked about what I saw happen in the first inning. It's like, no, we have to get back in character. And they did immediately against two really good pitchers tonight.

And Sullivan's tough. He's really tough. And we didn't do anything really off of him, but I'm pretty pleased with how he tried to execute what we were trying to do off of him.

**Q. This is the third game of the College World Series where you've had Riley Cooper come out and pitch in relief. What gives you that trust in him, and what does his recovery process look like?**

COACH JOHNSON: I think when you're physical and bigger and stronger, he's one of the strongest guys, pound for pound, on the team, you tend to recover better. That's part of what makes him - him is the stuff that shows up. But again I've said this before, probably over the two

weeks before we got here, it's not about spin rate right now. It's not about velocity. It's about pitch execution and winners. And he is a winner. And that's why I believe in him.

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