

# 2023 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 22, 2023  
Omaha, Nebraska, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Thatcher Hurd

Tommy White

Paul Skenes

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 2, Wake Forest - 0 (11)

COACH JOHNSON: Couple of things. Sorry for the delay. It's one of the greatest moments in my life, honestly, number one.

Number two, couldn't be more proud of our team. I think that exemplifies the talent on this roster, but more importantly, the character and the people. And as I look to my left, I just see three great players that are better people than they are players.

The best pitched college baseball game I've ever seen from both sides. Obviously what Paul did was spectacular. What Thatcher did was spectacular.

You might see four pitchers that were on that mound tonight from both teams that will pitch in Major League Baseball All-Star Games.

And hat tip to Coach Walter and Wake Forest. We just slayed a giant tonight. And that was special.

And, lastly, look to my left, if you're one of the best players in the transfer portal, there's only one place to come. Last summer I spent a lot of time with these young men, and I think they would tell you they made the right choice. I'd want to join forces with them if they're out there.

**Q. Tommy, earlier in the week you told us you weren't freaking out -- everybody's freaking out on the Internet, I think is what you said. How confident were you despite the struggles in Omaha?**

TOMMY WHITE: I'm always confident in the box. That's just how I play the game. I don't think I was struggling. I thought I was doing all right.

COACH JOHNSON: You're not.

TOMMY WHITE: But no, I was super confident. Just doing my deal. That's about it.

**Q. Tommy, can you just take us through the pitch, what you were looking for and how you prepped for that at-bat?**

TOMMY WHITE: I was definitely going for a heater. I thought a heater was coming. But I was very amped up and I saw a slider that was up. And I put my bat head to it. That was about it.

**Q. Paul, I think a lot of people probably would agree with Jay here that this was one of the greatest baseball games that we've seen in a long time. To be right in the middle of that, to be on the mound against Lowder, this kind of epic duel, how do you describe the whole experience of it?**

PAUL SKENES: To be honest, I think it was, it might have been cooler for the people in the stands than it was for me just because all it comes down to is just executing. I didn't watch a whole lot of Lowder's outing. Obviously he did really well, executed really well.

But just comes down to slowing the game down and going out there and executing.

**Q. Paul, you come in on probably your shortest amount of rest you've had all season. And I'm just wondering, what did the conversation about starting today look like? Was there ever any doubt? How did you feel about coming out for the second appearance in the College World Series?**

PAUL SKENES: There was no doubt. I know our strength coaches, Wes, I knew everyone was going to do everything in their power to get me ready. Everyone's going to get everyone else on the staff ready to pitch two or



three more times for the bullpen arms.

But there was no doubt in my mind. To be honest, there wasn't a whole lot of conversation.

**Q. Paul, can you kind of describe about -- I don't know if you saw on the Jumbotron that you broke the SEC and LSU strikeout record -- could you describe what that moment is like for you?**

PAUL SKENES: I've gotten to talk with Ben a lot. And he called a lot of our games. Obviously had a really good career at LSU and in the Major Leagues. It's cool. And it's cool to leave a legacy.

**Q. You guys saw the bunt coming, but Tre' being able to make the play that he did and with the quickness and fluidity that he did, from your perspective, what do you think of that?**

PAUL SKENES: I think he showed everyone in the country that he's the most athletic first baseman out there. To be honest, I saw him lay the bunt down and Tre' kind of just came flying in and made the play. Picked me up.

TOMMY WHITE: As soon as I saw the bunt, like, the angle of the bat, I knew he was going to first. I didn't see Tre'. I was, like, oh, God, they're going to score. Then he came flying out of nowhere and Milazzo put a great tag on, so that was pretty awesome.

**Q. When you're watching a pitchers' duel like that through eight innings and you come out and you have to go nine, 10, 11, just to keep that up, just what kind of mentality goes into that? And Paul I guess could speak to that too to give your offense the time to win it.**

THATCHER HURD: Like Coach says all the time, it's just about execution. And I was going to do anything to get that win out for us. I wasn't going to let us down.

PAUL SKENES: I was with him in between innings. Super level headed. And he knew it just came down to what he went out there and did or what he was going to go out and do. If you keep it simple and make it about executing, it's a really simple game.

**Q. Thatcher, Brock Wilken up with two runners on, big spot. What did you go through mentally, what did you to execute to get out of that situation?**

THATCHER HURD: I was going to go at the strike zone, trust my defense, throw everything with full conviction.

**Q. This was a goal to get to this spot right now. And**

**talking to the guys on the field they said a lot of it this wasn't the end goal kind of thing. Your thoughts on being in the title series and what's ahead?**

PAUL SKENES: The whole year we knew we could do it. That was the primary goal -- we had a meeting like January 14th or something like that, and the goal for this season was to win a national championship. And everything along the way would be a bonus. This was what we've had our eyes on all year. And it's really cool to be here now.

TOMMY WHITE: Yeah, pretty much the same thing. But just going to come down to execution, just playing the game one pitch at a time. We know what to do. We know what we've got to do. And we're just going to play our game, hope for the best.

**Q. Tommy, after the celebration, you went and embraced Camden Minacci. I know you guys were close. Why was that important for you to do? And a number of your players decided to do it with Wake Forest players. Why was that important?**

TOMMY WHITE: Their season is over. It's a very hard time. They had had high expectations coming into this. And they played great.

I've known Camden and Bennett Lee for quite some time. We're all from Tampa. I played with him, against him growing up my whole life. And he's one of my closest friends. So I didn't want him to feel anything. I just wanted to make sure he was all right.

**Q. Tommy, you faced a tough pitcher in Rhett Lowder. Seeing him this whole night, what was difficult hitting against him?**

TOMMY WHITE: He executed every pitch. He threw all pitches for strikes. And he worked fast. He pitched great. But that's about it.

**Q. Jay, you've been part of some memorable ones, won a national championship. What about tonight differentiates it in terms of how special you feel it was?**

COACH JOHNSON: I'll correct you. I've not won a national championship. That's okay. I lost a heartbreaker two one-run games in the Finals. I'd like to try this thing through the winners' bracket one time.

But that's pretty special. It was not over-exaggerating, that is one of the greatest moments in my entire life, what happened on the field tonight.

**Q. In all the plays that were in this game that were so**



**close, how much, when you think about this years from now, are you going to remember Tre' Morgan crashing and flipping that ball to Alex Milazzo?**

COACH JOHNSON: We work on it all the time. It was a big benefit who we played to get to this point, when you look at Tulane, you look at Oregon State, you look at Kentucky. That's three of the best bunting teams in the country. And both going into the Regional and Super Regional we spent a large amount of time on bunt coverages to both sides, safety squeeze defense.

And we were finally able to get him back over to first base here in the postseason because he's healthy enough to do it. And what a play. Nobody's played better in this World Series than Tre'. And there hasn't been a bigger play in this World Series than that bunt play.

**Q. I saw you smirk when they asked Paul about getting the ball today. Could you elaborate a little more on the "no conversation"?**

COACH JOHNSON: It was pretty simple. We lost a very good baseball game on Monday night. I mean, that was high level stuff. If you rolled that out at Fenway Park or Yankee Stadium and you put big league uniforms on both teams you probably wouldn't know the difference.

That's a tough loss, and when you're in that 1-0 game everybody knows the importance of only having to win one versus to win three. That was a heartbreaker.

We played good against another good pitcher. And Hartle is one of the best pitchers I've seen in a long time.

So I felt like they just needed to be reminded of, we definitely can do this. Two things. I mean, my team in 2016 did it. And LSU did it in 2017. So we weren't doing something that was going to be unprecedented.

So you start there. And then the pregame speech Tuesday was a really simple speech. On the whiteboard in our meeting room. I just wrote out Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday.

And on Tuesday I wrote Nate's name down with eight other pitchers. And then we just drew lines over to Wednesday; it was going to be somebody in that grouping of nine. Thursday I wrote down Skenes and Hurd. I wrote down Saturday, Sunday and Monday, one game. This team to win the national title.

I looked at it and go, anybody have any questions whether we can do this or not. Great, let's get on the bus. That was basically the announcement that Paul would pitch

today.

**Q. Getting back to Tre', can you talk a little bit more about his development overall and what it was like for him dealing with the outfield when that injury situation was before he got back?**

COACH JOHNSON: He's a special competitor. He's meant so much to our team these last couple of years. And when it matters the most, that's when you get the best.

We've seen that the whole NCAA Tournament, Regional, Super Regional for sure and here in Omaha. The situation is never bigger than his plan. His competitive nature is spectacular. You add that with elite hand-eye, bat-the-ball skills, defensive versatility to play first base, athleticism to go to the outfield.

There's not many guys that have all that skill set. And there will be a professional team when this is all said and done that will have a talent that's also a winner that can do pretty much anything.

**Q. The same question about this being the goal, not done. From your mindset now, you wanted it so bad for these guys now they're in the title series.**

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think -- I haven't thought a lot about that just yet. We immersed ourselves in the present moment. And going into the NCAA Tournament, we talked about -- this team's had to deal with a lot of this thought of perfect because of their talent and expectations.

John Wooden used to say, winning is just about playing near your capability all the time.

And I think we really settled in. We haven't tried to do too much. And we really stayed in the moment. I think that was exhibited really well, which is why Paul pitched the first game of the NCAA Tournament.

I'd be a hypocrite if I said that and you don't lead with your ace against a team that was playing its best baseball. And so that was done for that reason.

And so I just think we've been so immersed in that, now that this is here, it's not a surprise. I will tell you this is the first time I've ever coached that I believed could win a national championship, hands down.

And so in that meeting that Paul was referencing to, what do you want to do? Like, literally me asking them, what do you want to accomplish. And it was kind of quiet.

And I was like, no. We want a national championship. It

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

came out of Dylan's mouth. Are you sure? And then it's quiet. No, wait a minute, we've got to be really sure if this is what we're going to try to go do.

And so we put it up there, and just basically our road to the top. And then it wasn't about doing that, now it was about how are we going to do it, every step along the way. Both within the program and controllable things of are we going to be selfless? Are we going to have a strong mental game where we can recover from failure, resist the urge to be complacent?

And then it's into the baseball stuff, because the game doesn't change of what's required, and then we outline the things from the mound, defensively, offensively from the bases, that we felt like would be required to attain that long-term goal and laid it all out. And these guys have stuck to it every single day.

**Q. Obviously a star-studded matchup with Paul and Rhett Lowder, but what do you have to say about Thatcher and the decision to leave him in a game when you have a couple of guys warming up in the bullpen late in the innings?**

COACH JOHNSON: We didn't have anybody warming up. We had Gavin throwing light toss. You're talking about leaving Thatcher in?

Yes, that's one of the best college teams I've seen in a long time. Not just this year not. They had one of the most remarkable seasons I've ever seen. But that pitching staff, in my opinion, has seven guys that will pitch in the Major Leagues some day. Seven that's a lot. They're really hard to deal with.

It was a funnel of pitchers that were going to be available today. And we wanted to get Paul as long as we could. I'm really proud of him for getting us through eight. I think it took that to win the game, honestly, and then there was only going to be one guy that would get the ball after that.

We would have used him to close the game last night if we needed to. I didn't want to do that because I knew he would be needed today and it gave him an extra day after Monday he was spectacular. I think there was one walk and only one 3-ball count the entire time he was on the mound.

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