

2023 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 22, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Wake Forest Demon Deacons

Coach Tom Walter

Rhett Lowder

Brock Wilken

Postgame Press Conference



everything they poured into our season and honored to be a small part of it.

Q. You guys stayed on the field for a long time embracing as a team. What were the kind of things that were said during that time? And what did it feel like during that moment?

BROCK WILKEN: It was a tough one there. We kind of just embraced each other and reiterated how much we love one another.

This is the last time a lot of us will get to put on this jersey. I'm glad I got to do it with two guys to my right and all 30 guys in the dugout. Those are my best friends. And I got to go to war with those guys every single day. I'm lucky and proud to say I played for Wake Forest baseball.

RHETT LOWDER: Brock covered a lot of it. Just kind of telling each other how much we love each other, that we've shown it all year. But kind of expressing it to one another.

We've come from so far. A lot of guys were here a couple years ago. It's a lot of hard work that went into. We were just kind of embracing each other and taking in the moment.

Q. Rhett, what went in to you being able to pitch on such short rest and being able to pitch 88 as effectively as you did?

RHETT LOWDER: I don't really know what went into it. I'm grateful just to be able to put this jersey on. So whatever I can do, whenever I can pitch, I'm going to pitch. This might be the last time -- it's going to be hard for me to take this off tonight. But there's no way I wouldn't pitch in this game.

Q. Rhett, to piggyback on that, there was so much anticipation toward this matchup, you and Skenes, and the two teams that have been No. 1 all year long and everything else. To be part of that historical game, really, when you exited the game did it kind of hit you the magnitude of the whole thing? And how do you describe the experience of this game?

LSU - 2, Wake Forest - 0 (11)

COACH WALTER: First off, congratulations to LSU and to Florida, two great baseball teams who are going to play this weekend for a national championship. And they both earned their way there, so kudos to that club.

So proud of our guys, not only for the way we battled today but really all season, our consistency and toughness all season. And you heard me say this time and time again this week, but the way that these guys love each other, as a coach, I'd rather coach this team and not win the national championship than coach any other team. And I'm just beyond proud of them.

And Rhett today, what can you say about Rhett Lowder today. Paul Skenes was fantastic, and Rhett matched him pitch for pitch. It was one of the best pitched college baseball games I've ever seen. And Michael Massey behind him was dominant. And Hurd was too for LSU.

Runs were hard to come by. And unfortunately we couldn't find a way to scratch one across there those first 10 or so innings.

Again, proud of this club. Brock Wilken, the season he put together, to be the ACC home run leader for a career in three years and to become the defensive player he's become and the athlete he's become but also the teammate he's become.

So just proud of these two guys on my left. I can't wait to watch them play for the next 15 years on my television. Proud of this team. Proud to be a small part of it.

Our coaching staff, I want to thank those guys for



RHETT LOWDER: I mean, this is probably the best game I've ever played in. Wish we could have come out on the other side, but credit to LSU. Like I said, they're a good team.

Paul Skenes is a really good pitcher. He's very impressive to watch. But it hit me a little bit, but every game at this park in front of these fans, it's just unreal.

Q. Rhett, you made history tonight, breaking the Wake Forest single-season strikeout record. From all the guys who played before you, what's it like to be part of that historical record?

RHETT LOWDER: I mean, Josh Hartle broke it the last time he was out there. I wish he would have had another chance to pitch and he would have broke it again. I'm super proud of him.

It's an honor to be listed with the guys before me. I'm excited for Josh and what his career is going to look like.

Q. A lot of people seeing you guys on this stage, for everyone who is in here, they watch you all season, but what do you guys hope that people learned about your team and what you guys already know about each other?

BROCK WILKEN: I think it goes a lot to say for how much love and care for each other that we have, that goes a lot longer than any talent will ever take any one. When people watch us we're never out of any single game. And how much fun we bring to the table every single day.

I hope that I can leave that lasting legacy on other people and my teammates, how much energy and passion and fun that I bring to this game. And I left it out all on the field tonight. And I wouldn't have done it with anyone else.

RHETT LOWDER: I think what we did a good job of what a lot of people might not know is how much fight we actually had. I feel like people say we play in a small ballpark and just hit home runs all the time, but just finding ways to win is what we've done all year long in close games.

And it takes a lot of grit and fight. And we've done it numerous different ways. But I think that's just something that we showed.

Q. Rhett, what is it like to have a guy like Bennett Lee behind the dish through all your starting appearances this season?

RHETT LOWDER: Bennett Lee is amazing. The addition of him to this team, he controls the pitching staff. He just brings the energy and is some guy you trust to talk to in any sort of situation, and you know he's going to show up every single day.

And big thing for a catcher, he's super level headed. So he could have a tough day at the dish and you have no idea, you would have no idea that you're pitching to a guy that's 0-for-3. That's one of the biggest things for being a catcher, that's awesome.

Q. 54 wins. You fall one game short of the College World Series Finals. What do you think is the legacy of this team and team 109?

RHETT LOWDER: I think just the evolution of Wake Forest baseball, to get to where we are now, it's something to be proud of. I'm super grateful, like I said earlier, just to be able to put the jersey on and to be part of what we've built.

And this is like this is a standard for Wake Forest baseball now. Just excited for when we get back.

BROCK WILKEN: As Rhett said, Team 109 blended the future and the past together. This is now the standard. And we exceeded a lot of our expectations and the world's expectations.

So to be able to go out there and play every day and leave a lasting legacy that people will always look up to, that means more than any personal accolade will ever mean.

Q. We talked so much about Rhett over the years, of course, but this performance today on this stage and his kind of overall legacy, how do you put both of those things into context?

COACH WALTER: It's impossible. I mean, a guy went 30-5 in his career. And this is the first game we've lost this year that he's pitched in. So obviously wouldn't be here without him.

And just a total gamer. He was just out there competing and battling, matching Paul Skenes pitch for pitch.

Again, the most amazing thing is he's an even better kid than he is a pitcher. He's just the kind of guy that you want to go to war with. Everybody on this team just has so much respect for him and love for him. He's the epitome of what you want in a college baseball player.

Q. Can you walk me through the decision process to go to Minacci there? And you walked Tommy in his

previous at-bat or two at-bats ago. Was there any thought of that? I know it's harsh to second-guess it now, you but your thought process?

COACH WALTER: Again, we were in between on whether to start Minacci in that inning, truthfully. And I always hate to be that guy that if you're going to go to go to somebody after one -- after the first guy gets on, then why didn't you just start the other guy. I'm always in between on that.

But, again, if we're going to lose this game I wanted Cam up on the mound. He's our guy and he's made pitches. And obviously you'd like to have that one back. But if you're going to lose a ball game, you want him to be the guy on the mound. Give credit to Tommy White. He put a good swing on the ball.

Q. I'm wondering, didn't feel like there were many mistakes by either team tonight. It just felt like someone just took the moment and won it. What was it like to be a part of a game of that magnitude on this stage with so much at stake where players played to that level?

COACH WALTER: I mean, the expectations coming into this game with that matchup were off the charts, and both teams delivered on that. And that's near impossible to do.

And we were like through seven innings and Paul Skenes hadn't walked anybody yet. I was just blown away by -- obviously he's got great stuff. I was so impressed with his ability to make pitches. And they weren't even really that many three-ball counts.

And our game plan coming into it was to drive his pitch count up, and we just weren't able to do that because he threw so many strikes. Again, we delivered on the other side of that.

You're right, there weren't any mistakes. We made one bad pitch and Tommy White didn't miss it. And we hit some hard balls off of Hurd. We barreled up probably six balls off of Hurd that were kind of right at people. We didn't get the big hit; they did.

Q. How deflating was it for the team to see Nick Kurtz pulled from the lineup? And how happy were you with what Jack did out there tonight?

COACH WALTER: Really impressed with Jack. We put him in the lineup at Louisville, and I was proud of him then, too, because he looked like he just belonged. He didn't miss a beat.

He went in there today and got our first hit, obviously, and had some other good at-bats, took some good swings, played well defensively.

We were trying to find a situation to get Kurtzy in there. Kurtzy said he had one at-bat in him. And we were trying to get a guy in scoring position for him. And the only really time we got in scoring position it was Lucas Costello and Brock Wilken up. So obviously not going to hit for those guys.

But I have to think if we had had a healthy Nick Kurtz this week, the stuff that happened today was kind of a hold-over from the Alabama Super, truthfully, and he's been battling all week. We have a healthy Nick Kurtz, maybe, who knows, maybe yesterday is different too.

Q. In the huddle on the field, what was your message to the team but also personally what were the emotions going through your mind?

COACH WALTER: Postgame?

Q. Yes.

COACH WALTER: I mean, I just told those guys I was proud of them and I loved them and wouldn't want to be here with any other group of guys, and to hold their heads high, enjoy the moment, soak it in, just be present in the moment, take it all in.

Wake Forest will be back in this game again, and I know it won't be with all these guys on this team because we've got several guys that will be high draft picks, but we've got a couple of seniors too. I'm sorry they won't be back in this game, but I know Wake Forest will be.

Q. Probably the key moment of the first 10 innings, the squeeze play. Walk us through that decision and then what you saw -- kind of like he said, it didn't seem like anyone did anything wrong, they just made a play on him?

COACH WALTER: Bunting maybe just a little too hard. But I thought it was a pretty good bunt. Give credit to Tre' Morgan, he was straight vacating on that ball. The reality of the situation is, you could maybe hold the runner there because I don't think they would have been able to get an out on the backside of that because of the way he crashed. I don't know that they had anybody covering first base.

So I think if we make a little better slide there, we're probably safe. I think we just got a little too high with the slide. But, again, it's a great defensive play by a great defensive first baseman. And I think both teams did

everything right.

Q. The other part of that inning, the peak of that game in a lot of ways was the bottom of that inning, but you got a guy at second base, Crews, coming up. You decide to pitch him with Massey, and you walk White, pitched to Morgan. The way it all worked out for you was really good -- curious if you could explain the strategy there because I thought it was compelling.

COACH WALTER: Anytime you consider walking somebody, you're looking at him saying, okay, we've got to pitch to two out of three guys, which -- and had to pitch to two of them. Couldn't pitch to one of them.

So we just chose Crews and Morgan in that situation. We felt like Massey, with his ride on his fastball, was a good matchup for Crews. And, again, Tommy White, the key to getting him out is to be out of the zone. And that's what the plan was there in the last inning, and we just missed center cut. When you miss center cut on Tommy White, he's going to punish you.

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