

2023 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Florida Gators

Coach Kevin O'Sullivan

Wyatt Langford

BT Riopelle

Josh Rivera

Pregame Press Conference



So they definitely have the blueprint for a team that they have right now to play in the position they are right now. And I think that's why they're in the position they are.

JOSH RIVERA: To piggyback off of them, like BT said, they're coached really well. They play with a lot of fire and intensity. Like Wyatt said, they've got a really deep bullpen and a very deep lineup. It's going to be very exciting to see us against them in the championship, for sure.

Q. Wyatt, does it make it a little bit more extra special because it's an SEC matchup? And the conference as a whole, whether it's college football, basketball, just dominates college sports. How for you, as an athlete, does that excite you?

WYATT LANGFORD: Excites me a lot. Being a part of the SEC, we're the best conference in baseball. And I believe that all the way. So just match up with them kind of makes sense for all the fans out there and everyone that knows baseball. So we're all excited to play.

Q. BT, you've all had an extra day to maybe scout some of LSU, I would imagine. What have you seen in this pitching staff particularly down the stretch here that's made them effective or what will you have to do approach-wise against them?

BT RIOPELLE: I don't think they've done anything special than what -- or anything different than what they've done all year long. They've really relied on their Friday guy in Skenes. And he's provided a lot of really good and effective innings for them down the stretch. He's done that here.

Ty Floyd is a fantastic pitcher on Saturday. And they've looked to fill on Sunday. They've had a bunch of guys that stepped up out of the pen, different guys in different roles on Sundays, but they've pieced together and that's why they're here.

We've had a whole year to scout them practically because it's a team we like to watch. They play great baseball and we're excited to play them.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: We're awfully excited to be in this position. Last night's game between LSU and Wake was an incredible game to watch from a fan's perspective. We're excited that we have an opportunity to play here.

This has not been an easy road for us. Obviously getting to the SEC schedule was not easy. Going through the losers' bracket in the Regionals, playing South Carolina in the Supers was very difficult. Three one-run games out here and now the season is going to end with two SEC teams playing against each other. And we didn't have an opportunity to play with each other. It should be a lot of fun.

Q. As fans of college baseball besides playing the game, your thoughts on what you like and admire about LSU and their style of play?

WYATT LANGFORD: LSU obviously is a very historically good program. Just like their lineup is very good and one of the best in the country. And their pitching staff is also good. Kind of makes sense that we match up with them for this championship series. We're all excited to get playing.

BT RIOPELLE: Like Wyatt said, LSU is a historically blue blood program in college baseball I feel they always have been and will be. Their program is in great hands with a great coach in Jay Johnson.

They play with a lot of passion, a lot of fire. They feed off their crowd that they have every night when they play at home, and their crowd travels well when they play on the road.

Q. You and Dylan Crews were on the Collegiate National Team last year. What do you think having this caliber of talent and matchup between the two of you all does for college baseball as a whole?

WYATT LANGFORD: Yeah, I think it means a lot for college baseball fans to just -- not just us two but all the talent on the field between the University of Florida and LSU. So I mean it's just a very exciting series to look forward to and to watch.

Q. What do you like about your team right now. What do you take pride in that you feel like you guys are doing very well?

JOSH RIVERA: I said this many times before and I firmly believe it's how resilient we are as a team. No matter what the score is in the game, we always reiterate to attack and be ready for anything that could possibly happen.

We've seen it time and time again even when we're done we come in the dugout and as long as we have the will to fight and will to win, we put up good ABs play clean defense so can do anything.

Our resiliency is off the charts we never give in no matter what the score is. Or no matter what the situation is we just always try our best to come out on top.

Q. You guys have won your last eight games since that loss to Texas Tech. What role has momentum done for you as you've gone through your journey here at Omaha?

WYATT LANGFORD: Momentum means a lot. Especially in the College World Series where we have, like we've had two days in between playing. Being able to stick with that momentum and use that going into the next games means a lot to us as players and just the program overall.

BT RIOPELLE: I think momentum can be separated into many different ways. I think there's momentum within an inning and a game and obviously momentum within a season.

For us it's been momentum throughout the postseason, as you said. And we're just feeding off of it. Every guy that goes out there has all the confidence in the world in themselves and the guys around them. And without that you can't have success.

So I think the fact that we do have those things is the reason why we've had that momentum and have had that success in the last three weeks and we're just looking to keep it going.

Q. How much more comfortable are you getting playing in this ballpark now that you've played here three times and the factor of that into this weekend?

WYATT LANGFORD: It means a lot. Getting more games in obviously helps just with your eyes, seeing everything, getting used to the crowd. But going into Saturday, the crowd's going to be probably more than it has been all three games we've played. Just not the number of people but the sound and the noises being made and stuff. So we're excited to play in this atmosphere and we're ready to go.

BT RIOPELLE: Comfortability comes from experience. Not a lot of us have experienced this before. But the fact that we have played three games now in three fantastic environments says a lot about comfortability for us.

And the fact we've got to be able to know go watch these games at the park just as a fan. That plays a lot in us being comfortable at the park and understanding what it looks like from their side as well and not just being on the field.

It's awesome. It's been a great experience. And I think we're getting super comfortable.

JOSH RIVERA: I'd say over the past three games we've definitely grown more comfortable, especially with our practice days. The ones that we've had here, it's helped out a lot from outfielders getting fly ball reps in the outfield to infielders getting infield reps.

It's been great to just kind of get familiar with the field over this time period. And we're just very excited to get ready to go.

Q. How does it feel to have guys like Caglianone, Waldrep and Sproat fill in the course through the season to get to the best-of-three championship series?

BT RIOPELLE: It's awesome. I think for anybody that really has seen a championship team play before, you see three good guys starting on the mound, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Then that team has two middle guys that can fill in for middle innings and a guy at the end to close it. I've said that many times.

I think outside of a few teams, I think majority of championship teams have that. So the fact that we have the blueprint for what a championship team looks like on the pitching staff and on the mound every day, it says a lot. It's been awesome to see them throw this year.



Q. BT, you just said sitting in the stands and enjoying the series. Those that have been here for a long time are trying to remember a better College World Series than this one has been. Have you guys had a sense of -- the games you've been in, the games you've watched, last night -- a sense of how, have you had a chance to just be a fan, it's been so entertaining?

BT RIOPELLE: I said it earlier. This week has gone by so fast. Like I talked to our radio guy and he's like we were in Kentucky and then Hoover and it felt like an eternity. We were there for like a month.

For me it feels like a snap that we've been here because it's been a blast. This has been one of the coolest experiences of my life. But I'm just trying to soak it up as much as I can -- watching all the other games, watching all the other teams compete, as well as kind of looking back at our games and watching ourselves compete. It's been an awesome experience. And it's been super cool.

JOSH RIVERA: Like he said, it's been very exciting. This whole World Series has just been very exciting to watch. There's been a lot of nail-biting games, a lot of anxious games, especially ones that we've played in. But I think that's just the beauty of baseball.

This World Series has definitely highlighted that anything can happen in this game. Through the long nine innings we play you can never take anything of a pitch off. It's very exciting, and we're just very happy to be here and be in this position.

WYATT LANGFORD: I don't think there's really like a moment in any one of the games that I probably won't forget as long as I play baseball. And just being able to look back on this experience means a lot to me. And then being able to see all the other games and just realize all the other players are probably feeling the same exact way. It's been really exciting to watch and to play.

Q. Did you see LSU's defense last night when they covered the bunt and threw it home? And from your own perspective can you speak to practicing something over and over thousands of times and then coming up in such a huge spot and executing?

JOSH RIVERA: That play was huge. Tre' Morgan is a very athletic first baseman. They've put him out there in the outfield quite a bit. Like you said, practicing that play over and over again, it can develop some muscle memory.

But in that moment, especially in that big of a game, I feel like it was just definitely the athleticism. He showed off his

athleticism to charge very aggressively and go all out and dive and make a clean, accurate throw to home plate.

It was very special to watch. And like you said, doing that play over and over again at practice develops that muscle memory to help with that.

BT RIOPELLE: I think Josh covered it all, really. He showed his true athleticism right there, making a play like that. To be able to be under control, keep his feet under him and make a perfect toss -- it goes unseen, but having a catcher look this way down the first base line, not knowing where the guy is sliding, to be able to catch and tag a guy going full speed in one of the biggest moments of his career is pretty special too. So, yeah, it's a testament to how much they practice that.

WYATT LANGFORD: When it comes to these really close ball games, the level of talent that's playing, it's really those incredible plays on defense that get you to where you are and that allow you to move on to the next level and to the next game. That's just kind of what I saw and just how it played out.

Q. BT, how much have you, Sully and Kopp looked at this LSU lineup? And do you see any similarities to your lineup just with the power numbers, RBI guys that they have top to bottom?

BT RIOPELLE: Like I said before, we've really watched LSU all year long because you like to watch good teams that play baseball the right way and that have a lot of good talent, a lot of good players in the lineup. It's hard not to watch a team like that.

But they have a lot of guys that have come back from last year. So we know a lot about them. But, yeah, we've done a lot of in-depth research on these guys and what it's going to take necessary to go through a very potent lineup like theirs. And we'll see how it plays out this weekend.

Q. Curious the amount of rest you guys have had compared to a team like LSU, how beneficial do you feel it can be to get off your feet?

WYATT LANGFORD: I mean, it's very beneficial, especially when it comes to the pitching side of things. Really we've only played three games here. It seems like we've played a lot. But we haven't played as much as you kind of think. So we're all rested up and ready to go. We're excited.

BT RIOPELLE: I think rest is huge when you're on game 65 or 60-something in a season. Rest is huge. People see it as if they have a day off and eight teams playing they are

going to be more ready to play. We've played 60-something games, so I think we know how to get our bodies ready to play every day. It's just a matter of going out there and playing our best ball when it matters. So yeah, rest day is huge especially for pitching, like Wyatt said.

JOSH RIVERA: They hit it on the head. Rest is very important for us and especially for the pitching side. Make sure all of our arms are well enough to compete for the weekend. And like BT said, this is game like 65. So we are all pretty aware of how we need to prepare our bodies for this. And once again, to reiterate what Wyatt said, we're just very excited to get going.

Q. Wondering if you guys have thought about the coincidence of you guys being back in the national championship, first time since 2017. LSU obviously, too, you guys playing each other. Just speak on the coincidence of that.

JOSH RIVERA: I can't say I didn't think about that once we won the game against TCU, and just seeing LSU win that first game against Wake Forest. I definitely thought it could be that way. And it's very interesting to see it play out the way it did.

So I think it's just very exciting and it's kind of cool for Sully and Mike Rivera to kind of relive that once again. So we're just very excited to be a part of that and just really excited to get this thing going.

BT RIOPELLE: I guess it's kind of a coincidence, but it really is just two heavyweight programs that have really put in the work, done all the process necessary to get the right players to their programs to be able to be in a position like this, to have -- specifically for us to have Mike Rivera back on our team and bring those experiences for us and help us throughout this season hasn't gone unseen with us, but maybe have gone unseen for other people.

But LSU has done the exact same thing. They've brought in the right players necessary to be back here. And it's just a testament to two really good programs that have put in the work necessary to be back in this spot.

WYATT LANGFORD: Like BT said, it's just two really good programs just recently and in the past meeting up here in the College World Series. It's kind of -- it's cool that we're playing -- the same two teams are playing again. But at the same time it's we both expected to be here and be in this moment. So we're both excited, I'm sure.

Q. Wyatt, what does it mean to have a guy like Michael Robertson come into the game the last inning a few

days ago and make such a spectacular play to punch the ticket into the national championship series?

WYATT LANGFORD: I mean, that means everything, really. It's kind of just a testament to our team how we have guys that can come off the bench at any time and make a play and get a big hit, lay a bunt down, anything. Really. He's been our center fielder for the majority of the year. He could have been just not ready to play or anything, but he came in ready to play and did his job.

Q. Coach, just curious about the uniqueness of this, facing an SEC team that you really haven't played all season. And the players have talked about watching them but what goes into the scout and so forth and facing a team that obviously is in your conference but this is the first time you're facing them.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Obviously, there's some similarities. But we haven't played them obviously in a year, since last year. But, you know, the scouting report questions that have been asked, we haven't really done a whole lot yet.

Literally in the hotel you've got your bracket. You have TCU. You have Oral Roberts. You have Virginia. And then over here, literally, you have LSU from last year's notes and three empty folders because we didn't know who we were going to play and waste time or energy on something that might not happen.

We'll get together as a staff after we practice today and start going over all the things we need to go over.

But at the end of the day, we are who we are. And we're going to focus on what we need to do from our side to be successful. I'm sure there's going to be some things that we're going to have to prepare for. But we'll spend some time later on today with them.

Q. You mentioned previous to the tournament starting that you've had different kind of appreciation for it. Just what has this been, this journey with this team, been like for you this season, 60-something games in? And then to still be one of the last two teams playing baseball right now.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Well, really, it's really not the time to really think about it. It's hard to sit back and reflect right now. We've got an opportunity to win a national championship. And that's really my focus right now and the staff right now is to put our players in position to be as successful as they can be.

If I rambled on and on about how I felt about it at this point,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I wouldn't be giving you the right answer. You ask me this question a week from now or two weeks from now I probably would give you a better answer and reflect back.

But right now I think we're all focused on what was ahead of us the next couple of days and hopefully things will go the way we want them to.

Q. In 2017, you won both games, won the national championship, obviously. Do you remember kind of purple and gold taking over the stands in terms of the crowd and whether some aspects of this that will feel like a road game, do you think?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: No. I do remember, of course. I mean, I remember what it was like. I think that's one of the things that I will touch on probably tomorrow at some point.

The other thing that we have that could be helpful is Michael Rivera, who was our catcher on that team. He's now back getting his degree and he's our first base coach. And he lived it.

So, you know, the bottom line is there's not one person that stands that's going to have one pitch or one at-bat. It comes down to us executing. It comes down to LSU executing.

We played in some really tough environments in this league, and our guys should be used to it by this point. And I would hope that the play of the game is what's important. Like I said, there's not one person in the stands that's going to make a pitch or have an at-bat. We've just got to play the game.

Q. When I was hearing Josh's answer about resiliency, it really made me think that these two teams are a lot more similar than they are different, I guess. What are your initial thoughts of LSU?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: I think initially they were identified by their offense and rightfully so. They got some star power in their lineup. I think our team was the same way. Obviously they had Skenes who has had arguably the best season in the history of college baseball. But yet we've got Sproat who came back to school and we have Hurston, of course, and Jac.

So I think the biggest similarity that I see just from the outside looking in is the improvement with their bullpen over the course of the year, and I think the same could be said about us as well.

Q. With the lineup like theirs that is so potent, what goes into beating a team like that?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Honestly, it comes down to execution. I mean, you could probably ask them the same. I mean, a lot of it comes down to how the wind's blowing. A lead-off walk to start the sixth could change the whole complexion of the game. How you play defense, one error at the wrong time could change the whole complexion of the game.

We can get caught up in scouting reports and that type of thing. But Brandon has to pitch off his strengths regardless. Of course you have a plan but the plan in the big picture of things in a short series like this is execution and how many times can you get the lead-off hitter out over the course of the nine innings and stay out of an inning where you give up two or three runs.

So I'm more concerned with what we do well and try to do it the best of our ability, rather than what the other team does well.

Of course there's going to be some aspects you have to coach them up on. But if your team plays really well, you've got a really good chance to win. If your team doesn't, then you've got a really good chance not to win.

I think getting them in the right frame of mind, going back to the original question about the crowd and all that stuff, I think it's going to be important for our guys to understand that and accept it, and understand that it's going to be a really good atmosphere.

And we could use it to our advantage or not use it to our advantage. And the '17 team figured out how to use it to their advantage.

Q. Do you mind telling me a little bit about what you think about Tre' Morgan, not just from that particular play last night but in general from a versatility and competitiveness standpoint for LSU?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, I think I've seen enough of Tre'. I'm ready for Tre' to move on to the next level. (Laughter).

When they move into the outfield, I was always like this guy is probably by far the best defensive first baseman in our league. That just shows the versatility that he has. That was an incredible play last night.

It's a play we work on as well. But it's a gamble. Because if they don't bunt, you leave first base unoccupied and the guy at first can steal. If he doesn't bunt then you put your first baseman in a really tough position.

But they gambled. They executed perfectly. He's competitive at the plate. He hates to strikeout. I know that. He's up there to swing the bat. He's an emotional player. And I think the other players feed off of it.

He's a really good baseball player. Really good baseball player. Like I said, he's got a couple more games in him and then moving on to the next level. They'll have to get a new first baseman next year and that's their problem, not mine. (Laughter).

Q. I was wondering if you could speak to just the talent across these two teams and this matchup, multiple first- and second-round picks -- for this year and next year's draft. What's that say about the game itself and college baseball?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: I think you could say that across the board. It isn't just a Florida/LSU thing. You look at the level of talent throughout college baseball, there's games you play on Tuesday night all of a sudden you see freshman run out there on the mound in the mid-week game and you're going, man, I would like to see what this guy looks like in three years.

It's across the board. I think the college game is in as good of shape it's ever been in. I think it's evolved into -- it's a real developmental piece to move to the next level. And it's increasingly gotten better and better from that standpoint. But I think college baseball, it's never been better from a talent standpoint, honestly.

Q. The days off that you guys have been able to have, how critical is that, especially for your bullpen to be able to keep those guys rested coming into this difficult series?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: I think from a bullpen standpoint, it's been helpful. But, honestly, from my standpoint, it puts me a little bit on my edge, honestly. Because what you don't want your players to do is, off days, lose their edge. There have been plenty of teams who played on that Thursday game and went on to win this last series.

So it's really our responsibility is to keep our players off edge. That's going to be a huge message. The days off are fine, but you have to be able to turn the switch back on. Because LSU is coming off an incredible win last night, emotional win, that will help them be at the highest level are as far as feeling good about themselves going into Saturday's game. And we sat back and watched.

So, yes, the days off have been good from a bullpen standpoint. But you also gotta guard against losing that edge. And that falls on us to make sure our guys are ready

to play.

Q. Curious your thoughts on your team's offense, specifically as it relates to running the ball out of here under these conditions?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Well, it's a give and take, really. I mean, usually you look at the weather report days in advance want to know if it's going to rain or not.

But the wind has played a huge factor, especially on Wednesday when we played TCU. I could sense even in their dugout it was suffocating. It's like every ball hit in the air was an out.

And at this stage of the game, it's nice to hit home runs. It's very interesting question, because when you put your team together to win the SEC, it's built on power hitting and power pitching.

And in order to win the SEC and it gives you an opportunity to host Regionals and Super Regional and puts you in a position to get here. Now you get out here and it's a totally different game.

In back of your mind, when we've come out here and we haven't been as successful as we had hoped, you have to have the ability to manufacture runs in different ways. How you score runs the majority of the year with the three-run homer, that type of thing in our league, you have to prepare yourself for this too. And I think that's the real intriguing thing about playing out here.

Q. The top of the lineup, Cade, how much are you hoping maybe that hit gets him going a little bit and the importance of maybe 1 through 3 to get things started.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: I mean, of course. But at the end of the day, we're getting picked up by a bunch of other guys, too. I mean, I think that's what good offenses do.

Of course your star players, they perform over the course of the year for the majority part of the time. But there are going to come times when other guys have to step up. And it's a collective group.

When I mean that, I mean just not offensively, but like Ryan Slater coming in and getting five outs was huge, so we didn't have to go to Cade Fisher as early as we wanted to. And Michael Robertson -- when Shelnut and Ty Evans hit in the seventh and their lineup, their spot in the lineup is probably not going to come back up -- you could see Michael Robertson getting ready and Richie getting ready.

The guys know their roles. So when Michael makes that

catch, what an awesome story because he played most of the year but here he is getting loose in the dugout, knowing he's going to go out in center field because we had a one-run lead.

It's a collective group. But people have to pick each other up. I think sometimes we focus, okay, well, Cade is this for his last 20 at-bats or Jac is this. But we've got Luke Heyman picks him up or Shelnut has had big at-bats. Colby Halter has had big at-bats.

I mean I would hope that they would have the best games they possibly can over the next weekend. But at the same time we've got nine guys in the lineup that can contribute.

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