

2023 Men's College World Series

Monday, June 26, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Jordan Thompson

Thatcher Hurd

Dylan Crews

Cade Beloso

Postgame Press Conference

LSU - 18, Florida - 4

COACH JOHNSON: I don't know where to start. I'll do the best I can with this. The national championship team, I think the most gratifying part of it is they were national championship people every single day of this thing. And kind of feels like a two-year win, if that makes sense.

I think about meeting with Cade right when I got the job and said, hey, we're going to go to work and change a lot of things. And just his coachability, amazing.

Dylan is the best player in college baseball history, in my opinion. And just so thankful.

And frankly, it was a big reason that I accepted the job. I probably would have looked at LSU anyways, but knowing that I was going to have once-in-a-lifetime player on my team for two years was a big deal to do that.

I think about Thatcher. I told him, you know, when he said, yes, that he was going to come to LSU, I said, hey, big guy, you might be the most important recruit of my entire career, because I knew what the other three on the stage would do.

But to get to the national championship and get to the NCAA Tournament we needed real aces. And that's an ace right there, and one of the best pitchers in the country. It's kind of cool to feel that full circle.

I don't know that I'll ever have children like Jordan is as



close to what I would consider a son as anybody. And I'm so proud of him. I think Dylan and Jordan are the only two players that have started every single game for the last two years.

What a championship performance, heartbeat of our team. And I'm so proud of them. That kind of gives you some insight into it.

Some other thoughts. I really believe this will go down in one of the best teams in college baseball history. So consistent in the regular season. I think the SEC Tournament is the only week of the year we had a losing record, if you think about that.

Not only one losing week for an entire regular season. 11 wins in the postseason, six of them against SEC teams. And I really believe we played and beat every team, the best team that we could have played along the way throughout the entire tournament at that spot.

So I love these guys. I'm so proud of them. And they are a worthy champion, if there ever was a worthy champion.

Q. Dylan, you told me at the beginning of the season that you wanted to leave LSU a legend, bring home a national championship and win the Golden Spikes Award. You did all those things. What does it feel like to accomplish the things you set out to do?

DYLAN CREWS: Man, it's such a great feeling. I feel like almost every box was checked off except that national championship box. And we all knew this was going to be our last game here. And to finally say that I'm a national champion, it's the greatest feeling in the world. And I feel all boxes are checked off now. So it's good.

Q. For all three athletes, could you all talk about what was going through your mind when the final out was out and the dogpile and the celebration?

JORDAN THOMPSON: I mean, I got the first two ground balls of the inning. And after I got that second out, I kind of looked at Gavin and almost started tearing up. But knowing that we have to get one more out, I wanted that



last ball, too.

But I just can't be more proud of my guys and the way that we came out all year and just competed and fought through adversity. When guys went down, guys stepped up.

That just speaks about the character about our team and the way that we just handled our business and own our deal every single day.

So it's very rewarding for what we were able to accomplish, not only tonight, but the whole season.

THATCHER HURD: I mean, that is the greatest feeling in the world. And it's being a national champion, but it's with who we did it with, every single guy right here and every guy in that locker room. It means everything.

DYLAN CREWS: Yeah, man, I think we were all fighting for that last out, you know? The greatest feeling in the world. I mean, we've had some tough days in the fall, long days, just grinding it out.

We call it two-a-days where we literally sleep at the field and train twice a day. I mean looking back I wouldn't trade anything for that, for those moments right there, because this is where we're at now. This is the reason why we did all that stuff and it's just a great feeling.

CADE BELOSO: I had a different perspective, being in the dugout on that last out, but just hearing the crowd finally starting to realize what's happening. You look over in the dugout. You're seeing so many smiling faces.

I'm holding Sammy Dutton in my arm and he's just so happy. And watching that last strikeout, you can't put a price tag, can't put any feeling, words into that. It's so exciting and it's the sense of gratification. It's awesome, and it's everything that we work for.

Q. Cade, you said the other day that you grew you wanting to be Mikie Mahtook and Ryan Schimpf. What does it make you feel to realize that kids are going to be growing up wanting to be Cade Beloso?

CADE BELOSO: That's pretty cool. I'd want to be like this guy to the left of me, these two guys. But set a go goal and achieve it. We have a saying around here, don't dream because if you dream about it it seems unreachable. But set a goal and reach it. And the sky's the limit.

It feels good to be Mikie Mahtook, Jared Mitchell, Ryan Schimpf and Sean Ochinko now. That's something that no

one can take away from us, being national champions.

Q. Were you the one who started the ring gesture? And was that an idea you had coming into this game if you were ahead? What was the deal there?

DYLAN CREWS: I'm not going to lie. I thought about it for sure. I saw Joey V. do it and Reese do it. I thought I had a good moment to do it in the eighth inning and did it. And I think Tommy did it and Tre'. It's going to be a good picture. I'm looking forward to seeing it.

Q. Cade, Jay saying that he had the meeting and things were going to change. How did the program change and in what ways?

CADE BELOSO: This guy just loves baseball so much. There's not a person in the room that cares more about LSU, cares more about the game of baseball, more about people than this guy sitting to the right of me.

This program is so lucky to have Coach Jay Johnson. They'll have to build a new intimidator for what he's about to do. He's not stopping, I promise that.

But it's just the culture change. We don't really like to throw around the word "culture," but we're a group of hardworking guys that are never going to stop and are always going the keep playing through good things, bad things, et cetera. I think that's what changed the most.

Q. Thatcher, the offense put up a couple of big innings early in the game when you were out there. How did that help you calm down?

THATCHER HURD: When the offense is producing like that, my job is to get them back in the dugout as quick as possible. And that feels suffocating for the other team.

I just kind of tell myself, don't give them an inch. That's what I told myself through the whole outing, get us back, let them do their thing.

Q. When you guys are looking at this thing 20 years from now and might not be able to put it in full perspective, what do you think this 2023 team is going to mean to you guys?

CADE BELOSO: It's going to mean the world to me. To leave LSU a national champion is something I'll remember for the rest of my life. I'll remember playing with this guy and the two next to me.

Every time we see each other you're going to remember the national championship. You'll remember hugging at



the end. You're not going to remember what happened each game along the way, like, this guy got a hit, this guy punched them out. We enjoyed being around each other every day.

I'm sad it's over. We just won the national championship but I'm sad we're not going to practice and play anymore. But, man, I'm going to look forward to those reunions for sure.

DYLAN CREWS: It's going to be a fun reunion for sure. It's a struggle of mine as a kid to be where my feet are. I was always looking ahead, into the future. But when I stepped in the locker room this year and saw all the talent and all the group of guys that we had, I thought, it was my last year, it's so important for me to be where my feet are and enjoy these moments.

And to go out on top a national champion and to cap off my career, it's just an unbelievable feeling.

THATCHER HURD: The talent really speaks for itself. But the leadership and the chemistry in the clubhouse, I'll forever cherish that. And that's the blueprint for a winning team, the things -- Cade Beloso, Gavin Dugas, Hayden Travinski, the veteran leaders were able to do it for us.

As a transfer I didn't know anyone coming in. Take me under the wing right away. Dylan leading by example. Jordan taking charge of the field. Paul Skenes leading the staff.

That type of leadership is really special, and I'll cherish that. And I've grown so much by playing with these three, playing for Coach, and Paul, and the list goes on. It's just really special.

JORDAN THOMPSON: I think everyone's going to probably remember us because of this national championship. And I think for me the greatest honor I've had being at LSU and playing shortstop for three years is to be able to go to battle with these guys every single day -- practice, workouts, early mornings, days where you're tired but nobody cares. And those are things that you can't trade for the world.

And I just can't be more blessed and grateful for the opportunity that we all had to be together and to be able to share this moment. It's something that I'll always remember.

Q. Jordan, you kind of struggled a little bit in this tournament. Then a big day at the plate today. Coach was saying how you were going to be a great story. So what was kind of your mindset going into today?

And did you feel the crowd rooting for you?

JORDAN THOMPSON: I did hear them, I thought that was pretty cool. I think coming into today, we all knew this was going to be the last game of the season no matter if we won or lost. We just really wanted to leave it all on the line and not give an inch.

So I think not only for myself but everyone just came out here ready to go. From the moment that we all woke up and saw each other in the morning, when we had our team meeting, we knew what we wanted to do today and we knew what it was going to take for us to be able to accomplish it. I just can't be prouder of my guys.

Q. Was there sort of a meeting before today or a message before today just heading into this being the last game, the deciding national championship game?

JORDAN THOMPSON: I mean, kind of just what I said. We all knew that this was going to be the last game of the season. We just wanted to leave it all on the line.

Thatcher going out there and being able to give us everything he had for six or seven innings, whatever it was, that was frickin huge.

And Cade and Dylan, being able to do what they did today but all year, those are things I'm going to remember. I don't even know what else to say, man. It's just an unexplainable feeling. I wouldn't want to do it with a different group of guys. These guys are my brothers. I love every single one of them.

THATCHER HURD: I mean, can't say it much better than that. That's our last game as the 2023 Tigers. So we didn't have to get ourselves amped up. We knew what we were playing for. We played for that, played for each other.

DYLAN CREWS: We didn't really have a meeting. I think we all just knew, really.

We got punched in the mouth yesterday. But that's the beauty of baseball. You get to wake up in the morning and do it all over again. So as soon as the game was over, everybody already forgot about it.

And we woke up today and you could just see on everybody's faces they were ready to go. And there was nobody in the country, in the world, that was going to beat us today.

CADE BELOSO: Exactly what Dylan said. I don't even think we had a team meeting last night, which is super rare for us. It was like let's go get some sleep. Let's forget

about this one as quick as possible.

The message in today's meeting before the game was one game, game 71, for the national championship. Are you in? And that was pretty much it. I'm pretty sure you just walked away and we were all like, yeah, let's go.

You can't let baseball get to you. The game's brutal sometimes. And you get punched in the face. And just kind of show up and play the next day. I think we did a great job of that today.

Q. Dylan, instead of being drafted out of high school, you chose to go to LSU. After what you've experienced at LSU and here at Omaha, what advice do you have to any high schoolers who are deciding whether to be drafted now or go to college first?

DYLAN CREWS: Man, it was a tough out of high school. I was an 18-year-old kid. Didn't know what to expect for the future. There was a lot of, like, just if you go to school, it was like a bad thing or something like that.

So to make that decision as a young kid like that and to be able to go to school -- this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to go to school. And I wanted to experience this and bring a national championship to LSU.

So if I had to give any advice, it's go to school, really. Experience this. Don't miss out on these three years. Just develop as a player, physically and mentally for the next level and everything will take care of itself.

Q. You came to this game, it looked like Paul Skenes might go at any time. At what point did you know that you were going to be able to win a three-game series without him even throwing a pitch?

COACH JOHNSON: You know, the three in the eighth, when we scored three in the eighth I felt like the wind was out of their sails. You could see the pressing in some of their at-bats was taking them out of their plan. We were just able to keep piling up quick outs.

Like, after three, I didn't think we would get Thatcher through six. But we started to separate there and made it 10-2. Then we got a couple of quick innings. That made a huge difference.

Riley had one inning in him. And at a 10-2 lead right there, I felt we could get a quick seventh. And then it's Gavin. And then Paul's begging me to pitch the ninth. And I'm, like, absolutely not.

If they get within five we'll get you up and throwing.

But it's not coach-speak or anything. Like we really go through these assessments with them in terms of his hips, his back, his lower half, all of those things.

So his body is a great delivery. He needed to be able to stay in his delivery. We had to test all that stuff. Obviously test his arm. And then we felt like if we needed him we would have him for 30 pitches tonight. Then it became a decision of when do you use those 30 pitches.

And I felt like we would have given Florida a shot in the arm had I started him throwing two innings and taken him out of the game. And I didn't want to do that.

I felt like with a three-run lead in the eighth, and they see him trot out there, the psychological help that that would have been for our team would have been enough to finish a close game.

Q. You shared a very special moment with Jordan Thompson after the game. And just the last 24 hours, what he's been through and to have the game he had tonight, just your thoughts on that?

COACH JOHNSON: You see, we go way back, back before any of this LSU stuff. When he was a 15-year-old kid I was trying to recruit him to Arizona as a pitcher.

I remember seeing him walking by at a tournament. He had just picked LSU over Arizona. And he just looked at me like, go like this, and I'd shake my head and say, I'm still mad at you. I'm still mad at you. (Laughter.)

Has a great family. Cole Holland, his coach at Helix High School, is a good friend of mine. There's a lot of history there before me taking the job. As I mentioned with Dylan, knowing Jordan was here for at least a couple of years, that was an appeal to it.

Last year, the guy got so many big hits. But he made so many errors at the beginning of the season nobody paid attention to how important a player he was to the team. And it pissed me off to be honest with you. It pissed me off frankly because we wouldn't have been in a Regional last year if it wasn't for Jordan Thompson.

We went to work. I mean, every day, August 21st on, like the first day of school we had skill instruction and field defense.

And I'm really proud of the season that he had. And he had a tough tournament until tonight. He got way outside of himself at the plate.

But there was no way we were going to take the defense out because the defense had been so good. And then he made two errors yesterday. And they were really simple. I mean, he came out of his fundamentals on the double-play ball by trying to do too much. Then he tried to do too much and get the guy at third base.

And so if you just identify them for what they are and then coach them through it, there was never any thought of taking him out. And in the last 24 hours, just kind of -- my wife's asking me, is Jordan okay, this and that. Not really knowing all of it -- and so I brought him into my room this morning and go, like, hey, man, we're winning the national championship tonight. And you're going to do something special. But is there anything I can do to help you get to that point tonight?

And he looked me in the eye and said, "I'm good." And I saw tonight happen before it happened.

Q. This team was number one for 12 straight weeks. It's like not a question that they got this far, but this team had to play with its back against the wall the entire tournament. Is there an underdog mindset that sets in? How do you push through that?

COACH JOHNSON: I don't think there was any underdog thought with this team. I think we tried to take the number one thing and turn it to our advantage. Everybody was asking me about pressure and expectations.

And what you don't understand is it always comes back to the play and back to the preparation, things you've heard me say a million times. I actually don't just say that, we actually believe it.

I choked up, I looked at Cade, and just watching the tournament that he had and just thinking about where he was, where we got him, then he got hurt, missed a season, stayed with it. Had to beg him to come back -- not beg him, but recruit him to come back and not move on with his life.

And then to have that tournament. We're not the national champions without him.

So those things happen all the time. And a big thing for us, as we were going through this, is great teams play near their capability often. And I talked about staying in character a lot. And, again, those are not just words. That's what we had to do.

And if we did that, then I could surrender the result because I had so much confidence in what the result could be. And maybe the one time was when we lost a tough

game to Wake Forest, the other night.

I thought they looked a little down. And so, like, I grabbed them and just tried to rally them. Before we left, it's like, okay, we're not asking you to do something that hasn't been done here. I've coached a team that's done it. And LSU has done it before. Neither of those teams were as good as this team.

Now, we had a tall order when you're looking at Drew Beam and Tennessee, and then two games against Wake Forest and Rhett Lowder. That's impressive. The national championship means more because of who we beat to win the national championship.

Q. What do you remember about the process of putting this team together this past offseason, and what were those sort of hours and days like? And what was going through your head the whole time?

COACH JOHNSON: I think we looked at last year's team. I'm really proud -- part of me will feel like this national championship is for 2022 also. Like, we really had to dig our heels in. I mean, in the SEC, it happens fast. That was a ninth place team in 2021 in the SEC.

And we worked really -- I knew there were some good, young players, obviously. We worked really hard to develop those guys. We worked really hard to develop those guys, but we just didn't have enough on the mound. Like, guys have been hurt.

I think it was Marceaux and Jaden Hill were moving on in the draft. We didn't have a rotation. Thank God Ma'Khail Hilliard came back to school and flipped 70-mile-an-hour curveballs in there, and we were able to win enough games to have a 40-win season.

But I just didn't want to be in that position again. And felt like the pieces were here, with the position player group was a national championship team last year. Very similar, to be honest with you. But we had to get better on the mound. And we did.

And I think back of the week the College World Series started last year, I flew to Colorado Springs and met with Paul. I flew from there to California and met with Thatcher. From there I flew to Missouri and met with Christian. I flew from there to Tampa and met with Tommy the next week.

They all came on campus except for Paul. We had to wait for Team USA to be over. Called Paul every day of the summer.

And then we got them on board. And knowing that we

were pairing all of those guys with the strides that some of these guys had made in one year's time we felt pretty good about what this was going to be. And they were very humble about it, too.

This league's a beast. To beat Kentucky in the Super Regional, to beat Tennessee twice here, to beat Florida to win the national championship, that's really meaningful, because it's one thing to have the best writers in the country write about how great you are. It's an entirely different thing to go do it on the field.

Q. Does this core, this core that you guys are going to be losing obviously after this year, just talk about what it means, I guess, for the future of the program to kind of have some of these guys that have meant so much and kind of developed a legacy here for what you want to build going forward?

COACH JOHNSON: I think it's coaching. And I think looking at the past few College World Series champions, and just looking at this tournament, there's two things -- I said this the other day -- you can't be here anymore without future Major League players on your roster.

It's not happening. I don't know a ton about Oral Roberts because they were on the other side of the bracket. I'm sure there's a couple of big leaguers on that team. Then you have to have old players that really know what they're doing.

I think I'm excited about the young players that got exposed to this. And hey, man, Jared Jones, he's a big reason we're here. That's a borderline Freshman All-American.

Paxton Kling, he's a superstar in the making. Thatcher Hurd, every guy that pitched tonight might be back next year. The Wake game, all those guys might be back next year.

We've got some work to do. Hopefully the time lost on the road, I mean that's about as good an endorsement as you can come up with of what took place here the last two weeks.

Q. I had a chance to visit with your dad on the field a while ago. He was great. He said that you told him, when you were 5 that you were going to be a baseball coach. What's it like to share this experience with him and he brought up kind of the seven-year journey from you making it to the championship at Arizona to today and how difficult that was the first time?

COACH JOHNSON: Wow. Might see me crack here. A,

because I got started on this coaching journey really early. It's at the high school level but I grew up in the house of a legend. He's the winningest track coach in California history. He didn't lose for like 10 years, like 10 years. And he was a great football coach, offensive coordinator. My heroes were his running backs, and that's all I wanted to be.

So, I mean, yeah, that part in itself is something enough. But I sat next to Bill seven years ago today with leaving the tying run on third base in this game and the winning run on second base. And I think about it every single day.

And this championship is for this team and it's about this team. But personally, part of me feels like I got a little bit of that back tonight for those guys.

And they texted -- we have a group text, the 2016 team. And Friday morning on the off day I just walked around the stadium. One of them texted me on there. I said when we get this done that's partly going to be for you guys.

Q. To feed off this question, the coach has always had support. What would you like to say to your support and your staff?

COACH JOHNSON: Wow. This is a special place. It's a really special place. And I mean, Scott's there in the back. I think he's the best athletic director in the country. I'm obviously very grateful for him giving me this opportunity.

I mean, it's roll the dice. Man the west out here hasn't worked out. It hasn't worked out. I actually called a couple of guys that tried to do it just to avoid some of the pitfalls and got some great information from them.

But they really, I think, they took a chance. If you look at it in the big picture. But I know what our process is. And so for him, Stephanie Rempe, who is no longer with us, Dan Gaston is in the back, sports supervisor. Verge Ausberry. I sat in front of them and wanted this worse than anything else in the world and believed that I could do it, that I could do it with this group.

And they gave me the chance. So I'm grateful for that. But that's not where it stops. It's every single day. I mean, what baseball coach's athletic director calls them two or three times a week? Everything good? Dan is in my office every single day, what do you need? How can we make this process that you're trying to develop the best it possibly can be?

And then I'm just going to go for a second here. There's a lot of people that made this happen tonight. Wes Johnson is a special coach. I mean, he is a special coach. And I'm

not worried about replacing the pitching coach, I'm worried about replacing the person. That's going to be the difficulty because he's such a great person.

Josh Jordan, coming over here from Duke, he's an insane worker. I can't beat him into the office and all I do is work. It's amazing. He's done a great job for us.

Marc Wanaka, we've been together for like 25 years now, and the only coach that's been on my staff every step along the way. And you can't do it any better than he does it, and he doesn't get near the credit.

Dan Fitzgerald, now head coach at Kansas, we got to work when we got here. We got to work, and he busted his rear end to help put some of this team together. We don't get Nate Ackenhausen without Fitzgerald.

Jayson Kelly, last year, we did a lot with a little on the mound. And he deserves a lot of credit for that. Now head coach at the University of Washington. Coach Mainieri, I mentioned earlier on the field, making a transition as easy as it possibly could be. Spending time with him.

Nolan King recruited Dylan Crews. That's a massive hat tip right there. Alan Dunn. Those guys, like it's pretty awesome to look back at that.

And the G.O.A.T. himself, like, Skip Bertman, we're either in person or on the phone three to four times a week. And I'm sure I'm leaving some people out, but a lot of people contributed to this. And it makes it even that much more special.

Q. At most schools winning a national championship is like a fan's once-in-a-lifetime, and LSU, 14 years is like forever, from what Skip built. Did you feel that pressure when you walk in and maybe why you took the job, embraced those six national titles and wanting to add one?

COACH JOHNSON: I don't ever really think about it because that would distract me from doing what it takes to accomplish it. And I know that sounds super weird. But I'm not a normal dude in that regard.

I mean, like I said, sitting here next to Bill seven years ago was literally one of the most painful moments of my entire life.

I wanted to win a national championship, and I wanted these guys to win a national championship. I wanted last year's team to come to Omaha because nobody in the program had been to Omaha.

I mean, nobody -- other than the transfers we had brought in. So like just taking a second out there and looking at Dylan and looking at Tre', and looking at Jordan and looking at Ty Floyd. We had to win game one. Obviously everybody saw what happened yesterday. As we were mapping out the series. We have to win Saturday night. We had to win that game to win the national championship. We knew that going into it.

And the performance he gave, I want it for everybody -- it's a great state. It's like where I grew up. I want it for LSU. I know all that legacy and tradition. I'm so honored to be part of that. I really wanted it for these guys because they've done everything that I've asked them to do and set the standard better than you could possibly do. And that's why this is important. Not just because we're national champions, but because we've been national champions every day of this thing.

Q. Alex Milazzo said he was taught to play the game one way, hard, and I don't know if there's one way to sum up the team but him scoring from first and breaking a bone in his foot or whatever happened there, could you talk about that play and the player he is?

COACH JOHNSON: How about the at-bats he gave us all year long? I remember looking at that stat line in '21 when I took the job, and, I mean, I had fans like sending me emails right when I got there, get rid of Milazzo, he can't hit, terrible, worse hitter I've ever seen. Shouldn't be a Division I baseball player. I looked up at the board tonight. I'm pretty sure he hit over .290. One of the best defensive catchers in college baseball.

More importantly than that, and that's all throughout this team, whatever we needed him to do when we needed to do it, he did it. It wasn't like I need more playing time, I need this. He was ready the whole way. Wasn't the starter. And four years into a career, when a freshman beats you out to be able to stay with it, be a great teammate, be ready to make your contribution, quadruple your production from an offensive standpoint, have every pitcher want to throw to you, like, there's a good chance he'll be on our coaching staff some day. That would not surprise me.

I always say, in practice, sometimes, when we're doing like a trick play or something, "Milazzo, when you're the head coach at Zachary High School you'll be able to do it with your team." He's special. All LSU.

I was thinking, in the ninth inning, wait, this is going to happen. Somebody's got to pick him up and throw him on top of the dogpile with a broken foot.

Q. Talk about the runners on base.

COACH JOHNSON: I'll give you insight. I didn't want to tip our struggles because we had to stay with the team. But today we had nine really good at-bats here with runners in scoring position. So we played them on loop. And they were short swings, low-line drives to the middle of the infield of guys not trying to do too much. So behind the scenes, that's where we were trying to get to.

But there's a real part of this thing where we just faced as good of pitching as you could for six of these eight games. And they made it hard. They did a nice job of it tonight. That's how I'll remember this team with runners in scoring position, is the 18-4 winning the national championship game.

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