

2024 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Scott Forbes

Jason DeCaro

Parks Harber

Vance Honeycutt

Press Conference



super grateful to be here. Really going to enjoy all this and all the media and all the events. Really looking forward to it. But also knowing that we are here to play baseball and to win a national championship. I think it really cool to step out on that field, and it's a beautiful stadium; but at the end of the day, we want to come home with the trophy. So staying focused on that goal.

VANCE HONEYCUTT: Yeah, soak everything in, soak all the experiences in, and then just tomorrow get right back to it. Wake up and get in your routine and get ready to go play ball.

Q. Vance, I'm doing a story about the role of analytics in baseball, and I actually talked to some guys from Rapsodo, who I know you have worked with in the past. Just how have they helped you just grow and become the player that you have become this season?

VANCE HONEYCUTT: I think analytics are great, but just kind of limiting what you are looking at. I don't think everything is good to look at all the time. So just kind of realizing kind of those things that work for you and just being able to hone in on those and use those to help you succeed on the field.

Q. Jason, this class that UNC brought in, a lot of them contributed early. What do you think led to the success of having so many people that are freshmen contributing?

JASON DECARO: I think the great leadership that we have from the other guys played a huge role. Whether it's on the field or off the field, they're always there to give you advice or help you out if you need it.

I think that's been really big from day one. Just kind of having them by our side and if you have any questions, you can ask them. So that's been huge.

Q. Parks, you guys are familiar with some of the teams, and you have even had a big showing before. What goes into making what kind of team you're going to be facing and what the opposition is going to look like after, I guess, a couple of months of maybe seeing

THE MODERATOR: We're joined here on the dais by North Carolina, head coach and three players. Coach Forbes, give us your opening statement.

SCOTT FORBES: Hello, everybody. Number one, I want to thank Omaha and everybody that puts this thing on. It's a special event. It's run so well. Our guys are already experiencing things that they're never going to forget. On behalf of the University of North Carolina and our program, we thank everybody for that.

We're excited to be out here. Our guys have worked really hard to get to this point. We've had a really good two practices. The guys fought hard to get through that regional and get through that super regional. They were both tough. They earned it.

I'm looking forward to watching them get after it tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players, please.

Q. Guys, you got through the first couple of practices here now. Lots of media, lots of lights. How do you guys stay loose and get ready to play that first game?

THE MODERATOR: Jason, can you start?

JASON DECARO: I think just realizing that it's a privilege that we get to be here and experience all this. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Never going to forget this. So just taking it all in and kind of just enjoying it.

PARKS HARBER: Same for me. Just super fortunate,



some of these familiar faces?

PARKS HARBER: Yeah, I think baseball is an interesting game where you want to prepare for the opponent, but I think it also comes down to your own team too. If your own team handles business, then it really doesn't matter that much about the opponent. If you can do things the right way out of your side of the dugout.

I think with that being said, both teams have grown a lot the last couple of months. Both teams have definitely improved, but I feel like we're playing really, really good baseball right now. So just kind of excited to get out there.

Q. For Parks and Vance, your college career will end here. Does that give you a little bit more sense of urgency, knowing this is your last shot at a title?

PARKS HARBER: For me just really excited and grateful for four years of hard work, and I get to finish here. I think I'm just super fortunate to play my last game of college baseball in Omaha.

I think this opportunity is really special. So I don't want to put any extra pressure on myself. I just want to go out there and do the things we've done all season, knowing I really, really want to finish my career with a national title.

VANCE HONEYCUTT: I don't think it changes day to day. It's the same game. Just on a bigger stage. I think just being able to really soak it in, but also understand the real reason why you're here and just really have fun with it. Honestly, just soak it all in with these guys.

Q. With the big diamond that you have out there and so much territory, is that an advantage for guys like you and Anthony who can cover so much ground?

VANCE HONEYCUTT: Yeah, I think so. A lot of balls that were hit at the Bosh this year that kind of just barely snuck out, I think they ran out of room at some times. Being able to have a bigger park, you know, with a lot more room, it will give us more chance to just roam.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, you're more than welcome to leave the dais and go back to the clubhouse.

Questions for Coach Forbes.

Q. Coach, with half of this College World Series field being made up of ACC teams, is there a sense of conference pride, league pride in seeing this great representation of your league that you have been saying since the beginning of the year is one of the best in the country?

SCOTT FORBES: Yeah, absolutely. We don't back down from that. We feel like the ACC has continued to improve. I felt like this year out of all my years being involved in the ACC, and I have been involved in them a while now, top to bottom it was the best.

If you didn't play well, you would lose. I think some really good ACC teams didn't even make the NCAA tournament. It's a testament to our league, testament to how hard the coaches are working to get great players, and then those players obviously are doing the work on the field.

Q. Obviously it's easy to talk about Vance and Parks and the guys that have been around college baseball forever. Talk about the impact of this freshman class and what made it kind of the secret sauce for this team's success?

SCOTT FORBES: Yeah. You know, Coach Gaines, Coach Wierzbicki, and Coach Howell, I have been in their shoes, and I know how many hours you're behind the wheel of a car. As a matter of fact, this morning we were joking. I felt like we were in the olden days -- well, not the olden days. It's what you do now. You start games at 9:00 or 8:00 at LakePoint, and we call it Bake Point.

They just did a great job putting that class together. We got them here for summer school, and that's something we've been able to do at North Carolina, which has been really valuable. They take two classes. I get to be around them a lot.

Now, the draft is later, so the guys can really start seeing, okay, if they do end up signing professionally, what they might potentially miss. It's a close-knit group. We have some older guys back, Jake Knapp being one of those, Vance doing his rehab that spent a lot of time around that class, and it helped them mature really quick.

As soon as we started up in the fall, it was like, okay, this is an extremely talented class. We felt like we needed way more depth, especially on the mound, and we felt like we had hoped this class could address that.

With what we had returning, we felt like if two of these or three of the position players, including the transfer portal guys, can make an impact and some of these arms can make an impact, we had a chance to have a special team.

Q. What's your pitching approach knowing that if you make it to Tuesday, you are getting a day off every day? Does Aidan get used in the bullpen? What's your plan?



SCOTT FORBES: Oh, yeah. The plan is to go after Virginia and go after that game. That is the plus of being out here and running the pitching staff and having those conversations.

At the end of the day, we don't play during the season unless it's midweek, but we play those big weekend series in our league. You don't get a day. So every one of our relievers, they're all horses, they all can handle a big workload. They've all been managed well all season. So we will move Aidan back into that bullpen to start for sure. He'll be available ready to rock 'n' roll against Virginia.

Then we'll try to beat Virginia, and then we'll announce a starter after that. Most likely it will be Sprague.

Q. I was asking about the bigger field and with Donofrio and Honeycutt covering so much ground. Do you feel like that's a big advantage for your team?

SCOTT FORBES: Absolutely. I feel like they've been at an advantage all season. That is one thing that's different in the game now that I've noticed is pitchers are throwing harder and trying to pitch at the top of the zone more, getting more fly ball outs than ever in college baseball.

We've put a big emphasis on that, obviously, having a generational center fielder like Vance Honeycutt, but also putting two other guys out there where you don't give a team extra outs.

Matter of fact, we've stolen a lot of outs. When you have an outfield like this, you can prevent triples also, because you can hit some triples in this park. It's going to be big for anybody.

Q. Vance has learned so much over this year. What has he meant to this program, and how have you seen him mature as the year has gone on?

SCOTT FORBES: I mean, again, maybe I will, but I've never coached a combination of power and speed. The kid has never taken a day off. I've never said a word negative to the kid. I've never had to say, Hey, you know, keep your head up. Or if he is 0-for-4, 4Ks, which has happened to him, you can't tell.

He's an unbelievable leader off the field. He's done an unbelievable job in the classroom. I don't like to use the word "perfect" because nobody is perfect, but he's been an absolute pleasure to coach. And there's a reason we've had the success we've had, and there's a reason that this team made it to Omaha.

Obviously stepped up and played great for us. But when

he wasn't, quote, hitting the home runs or getting the big hit, he was doing so much more for us. Obviously playing an unbelievable center field, but he is a lead-by-example guy, and that's really helped these young guys.

That gets passed down. Look at these guys that are here today that played in our program. When you have that leadership in your locker room like that, it affects you years down the road, and that's what Vance Honeycutt -- he will leave more than what you guys see on the field. He'll leave a much bigger legacy than that for sure.

Q. The other day I heard some of the players show that after every email you say you love them, and so many of them have talked about why that's such a special part of this team. Just at the foundation of this program, the team, why is this team so close-knit, and why has that love been a part of why this team is here?

SCOTT FORBES: I don't think we say it enough, and the older I've gotten, I just felt like I think it's important, and I think it's the most powerful word in the world. It's the most powerful thing in the universe.

Love conquers all. It overcomes everything, and we don't have enough of it in general. I want these kids -- I sat down with our coaching staff this year before we started the fall. I said, I want Boshamer Stadium to be the place that they love the most. I want it to be the best part of their day.

The only way that can happen is if we lead by example every single day. Yeah, we're going to be competitive. We're going to coach them and be honest with them. There is tough love, but when you feel that as a player -- I was a player -- you know. You know how much a person cares about you because they talk to you.

That's the key to coaching in my opinion, getting to know every player individually because if you don't, you don't know what buttons to press with that player. But I also wanted them to know, like, this tough, macho, you can love people and still be extremely tough. As a matter of fact, I think you're going to be tougher.

I hope that will continue to be the backbone, and hopefully those guys will understand that when they're older and more important things than just baseball.

Q. Is there going to be a moment before tomorrow's game where you take the players aside and sort of like Gene Hackman in "Hoosiers," you just say, Hey, the baselines are still 90 feet, pitching mound is still 60'6", just to make sure they don't get overwhelmed by the stage basically?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

SCOTT FORBES: Not with this group. I think from the first pitch of the season, this group has played like they've had something to prove. These kids, they pay attention. We weren't ranked as high as all these other ACC teams. We felt like we had a really, really good team, and we feel like the University of North Carolina baseball program has been as good as any program in the country. We're proud of that tradition.

We also wanted to make all these players that laid the groundwork proud as well. So the only thing I've told them is, Okay, this is why you came to North Carolina. That's what I told them before I played LSU. That's what I told them before we played West Virginia.

That's all I'll say: You came to North Carolina because you wanted to play in the College World Series. So the last thing you want to do is look back and say, you know, you didn't slow the game down, you didn't stay with your routine.

We have a saying: Default aggressive. If you are going to make a mistake, it's going to be overly aggressive and get out there and try to go get it.

Q. How will tomorrow's game be different than that series at Charlottesville? There were a lot of home runs hit. How is that going to be different? They get a lot of extra base hits within the ballpark.

SCOTT FORBES: Both teams are much different, especially on the mound. So both coaches, you know -- Brian is a heck of a coach. Both coaching staffs are going to manage their pitching staffs different. I think both the pitchers -- if a pitcher is going, it doesn't matter how good the offense is sometimes.

But that being said, both of these offenses are really good. They're both very dynamic. I hope they don't hit a lot of home runs tomorrow. Hopefully we'll sit some.

I think both teams are way different. I know we are. So I'm looking forward to playing Virginia because we also have a lot of respect for them. They do it the right way. It will be a battle, that's for sure. Two really, really good teams.

Q. You mentioned the moment being big and keeping them in their routine. This might be an odd-ball question, but what goes into picking out the uniforms and the -- any special spiritual things, superstitions that go into it?

SCOTT FORBES: No, a lot of times I just get with the leaders. We named captains for the first time since I've

been at North Carolina, so I talked to them. And then Vance has been included in a lot of those because he's almost a captain. Basically he is.

I say, you know, What do you all want to wear? We're the home team, so we're going to wear white. We got all new uniforms this year.

Again, this team is extremely process-oriented. We're going to do the same thing we've been doing game one. We're the home team. We're going to wear our white pinnies, and we'll go from there depending on whether or not we're visitor and we'll wear whatever we've been wearing as a visitor. Nothing too much going into it.

We did eliminate one uniform that we were having -- you won't see us wear the white pinstripe pants with the Carolina blue top. We haven't had much success in that one, so (laughing)...

Q. With the way the portal is opening up, what are the challenges that you create when you are still playing to also look ahead to next year?

SCOTT FORBES: Man, I can answer that question. It will take me about an hour to talk about the transfer portal.

Number one, we all have to figure out how to get the transfer portal not to open until the College World Series is done, but it is what it is. You embrace it. It's just like NIL. You can complain about it all you want, but it's part of the game.

The way I look at it is you figure out a way to make it make your program better and maybe help your guys. With the transfer portal, you know, we're on it every single day. We're checking it. We have our own system of the type of kid that we're looking for. We know what our needs are.

So we've already got a couple of commitments off the transfer portal. I'll be on the phone today. I actually have a Zoom set up later with a kid that we really, really want and try to -- there's no better time, though, to recruit than when you are in Omaha. We use that to our advantage and try to put together a team that we can get back here with.

Q. Two-part question. One, did Vince Carter take you up on your offer to sit in your box in the supers at West Virginia? Two, have you heard from any UNC celebrities, quote/unquote, leading up to tomorrow's game?

SCOTT FORBES: I don't think Vince made it. I don't think. I know a lot of -- basketball had their own suite, I believe. So I don't know who all was in that suite. I didn't look up a

ton. That game was too close to look up there.

I don't know about celebrities. That's a great question. If I knew they were coming, I couldn't tell you anyway.

Q. Dovetailing the question about the transfer portal. You have the prospect of six of your eight regulars -- losing six of your eight regulars. How important will that be to keep it going next year? Then, also, with possibly six of those guys playing their last games for Carolina, how emotional is that for them and for you?

SCOTT FORBES: Any time anybody in our program it's their last game, whether or not they're starters, it's going to be emotional. I told you last time, why do you have to remind me we're losing so many of those guys? That's where the transfer portal can help you.

We also still believe in -- we look at Gavin Gallaher and look at Luke Stevenson, even a guy like Olin Johnson, who had some valuable starts. There are a lot of other guys. Matty Matthijs, he was okay last year, but he's gotten a lot better. Dalton Pence has gotten a lot better.

That's one of the things that I'm really proud of at North Carolina is it's not our development. The players develop themselves through hard work, but we do feel like we can still get great high school players. They can stay in our program, and you are just not going to see -- while I'm here, we're not going to probably have 20 players off the transfer portal. I don't think that's the recipe for our success.

It's combining those two and even the transfers that come in, like a Madera from a Division III getting better from the time he gets here until now. That's what's so important.

We do have one celebrity here. Dustin Ackley is here. He's a walking base hit, just so you know.

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