

2024 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Florida State Seminoles

Coach Link Jarrett

Daniel Cantu

Alex Lodise

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up with an opening statement from players.

LINK JARRETT: Proud of the team. Proud of these two. Proud of the program and what was accomplished this year. It was a difficult trek. The response from last year for this group to open the season and go one-third of the season without losing a game, pretty remarkable.

The schedule was difficult. The midweek stuff is such a challenge. You guys know what the league is about. They earned everything that they achieved. This is the pinnacle of the sport. You'll never see the sport played at the amateur level better than you're going to see it in this event. The age of the players, the physicality of the players, the ability for players like these two guys to find a home that suits what they're trying to do for their future, it's as good as you'll see.

The hospitality in Omaha, absolutely love it. It's building. Like I've seen it 34 years ago, and I was out here three times as a player, and it just continues to grow, and it has grown from 2022 to today. Watching this thing build, the energy and excitement and the field and the vibe of everything that surrounds this event puts it in the conversation with any other major sporting event you want to talk about: Augusta, the Final Four, Super Bowl. Just pick one, this matches it.

This weekend is awesome, and it's because of the community. It's because of guys like these two that have elevated the sport. It's because of the coverage that you guys provide that has made this a global event, and the college game has never been in a better position. How is that?

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions for the players.

Q. You just finished up your first practice on that field. Tell me a little bit about the field, how you felt going out there, and then also how you keep it baseball when you are here?

DANIEL CANTU: The field is in great condition. The grass is a little bit different than Florida grass, but it plays a little slower. Maybe they'll cut it tomorrow, but we'll see.

It's been great. The field is pretty big, but nothing that we can't handle.

ALEX LODISE: Like he said, the outfield is very different dimensions than our home park. Right field is a lot deeper. We don't have the high fence. We'll just be able to adjust to it and play our best ball.

Q. I'll ask this to both of the players. What maybe is the biggest difference or two differences between last year's team and this year's team in terms of the struggles you guys had last year and the success that you have had this year?

DANIEL CANTU: We weren't a part of last year's team, but hearing what went on last year, we definitely wanted to come in and make a difference and help this team win and build a winning culture again and get back on track and back to the promise land in Omaha, and that's exactly what we did.

ALEX LODISE: Like he said, we were not here last year, but we know our team. We're just one big family. That's all Cam Leiter we are. One big family. We just go out and we just play like we all are a family and just have fun while we're doing it.

Q. For the players. I think I talked to Cam Leiter last summer pretty soon after he committed. He candidly said he wanted to come here to get Florida State to a College World Series. How much was that a selling point for you, and how quickly did you think this team could do that?



DANIEL CANTU: I saw what Coach Jarrett was building over here at FSU, and I wanted to be a part of it. He brought in some really great guys to get us back here, and we all -- he did a really great job helping blend this team together and help us create that team chemistry, and we created a great family chemistry, like Alex said.

Yeah, we built that and got a winning culture back at FSU, and we're here to stay, and we're here to win.

Q. Daniel and Alex, you were the first of eight teams to punch your ticket here. Was there anything you could scout on that you sat back and thought, okay, we can play these teams?

ALEX LODISE: We're a very confident bunch. We know we can play with the best. These are the seven other best teams in the country. We're here because we can compete with them, and we know that watching them -- when you watch other teams play, it's knowing, like, with our confidence we're here, and we know we're capable of playing.

DANIEL CANTU: Like Alex said, we are a very confident bunch. We feel as if we carry ourselves and feel as if we're the best in the country, and we know that we can beat anyone if we play our brand of baseball.

Q. For either one of you guys, what's it like playing for Coach Jarrett?

DANIEL CANTU: Coach Jarrett is like Pappa Bear and we're just his younglings. We follow his lead.

He does a really great job with really programming us and getting us all in line and just completing the task at hand each and every day and going out and winning -- going 1-0 each and every day and keeping us where our feet are in the moment and really just completing the task at hand. It's been a really great job. He's an amazing leader and an amazing coach. Very thankful to have this opportunity to play for him.

ALEX LODISE: He pretty much covered it. There's no other coach in the country that you want to go out to the field every day, and you see him as, all right, we're going to have a great practice. We know it's going to be structured well, and you just know what you are getting yourself into.

As infielders, there's no other coach in the country that I would rather learn defensive -- the defensive style from the infield from than Coach Jarrett.

Q. If you could maybe follow up, Daniel, just this is a

program obviously that had such a great success last year. Did not work out the way it had intended to. Did Coach Jarrett tell you he thought he could get you back to Omaha this year, and what kind of role did you think you could have in helping a team get to this level?

DANIEL CANTU: Omaha is always the end goal, but he kept us -- him and all the other coaches kept us focused on just a one-game-at-a-time mentality and going to war each and every day we get to step on the field and not really looking ahead, but looking at what is exactly in front of us with that day, and we get to play that game and we win that game, and we go 1-0, and then the next day we go 1-0 and then the next day we go 1-0. Those wins just keep piling up, and that's how we got here.

ALEX LODISE: Yeah, I mean, he said it. You play every day just to win that game on that day. That's pretty much -- when you win one game every day, it's going to help you get here.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much.

Questions for Coach, please.

Q. Does your personal experience being here as a player and a coach kind of help you set up with your staff and your players to get them ready to be here for the whole week?

LINK JARRETT: 100%. How you feel as a player, I've got that. How you feel as a coach in it, I've got that. How you feel as a parent here, I actually have that too. Like, the 2021 deal.

So, yes. I try to go into that reserve and pull out what information I think really helps them, helps the coaches and actually helps the parents. I wanted the parents to have the timeline of what we're doing because you've waited your whole parental life to get to a moment where you can be here. So I want them to all learn from me, and I feel like my responsibility is to create the most seamless path for them to get to Friday when we start the actual game.

So that's what I try to do, and I do. I look at it from every possible angle, and there's very few -- I'm fortunate to have seen it from all of those angles.

Q. I think after the super regionals you talked about there being five facets that you sort of build a program on. How did you see maybe your team grow over the last year in those areas, and how did the new additions help you guys get where you wanted to go?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

LINK JARRETT: Program development, big-picture stuff, big-picture facility, calendars, big stuff, alumni, that program, player development. What am I going to do with Cantu and Lodise every day that they're practicing and playing the game? Evaluation. Was Cantu the correct person when we evaluated him to bring into the program?

Recruitment. How do you convince these two guys to come to your school? You can evaluate better than anybody in the history of the sport; if you can't convince the right people to come to Florida State, then it doesn't matter how well you evaluate.

Then you have to manage the game.

So what I've done today is really all of those. Program development is what I'm doing with you. Recruiting, our staff all morning. You can like the transfer stuff or not. The fact that we're trying to make these decisions and you are talking to players and they're calling you and trying to figure out how did the visit go last week, that's happening right now.

So all of this is in play to get to the game. When you think of, hey, you're a baseball coach, I think most people think of what happens from -- what time is our game? 6:07? The coach is coaching them up. They're playing baseball.

When you start in this industry, you really don't know that those five things are equally critical. If you are good at all five, you have a chance to be in this room. If you are good at four, it's up for grabs whether you'll make it. If you are good at two or three, probably not here.

So I try to dive in. I've been a lot of places. I try to dive in. When you get somewhere, what do you have to attack and fix in each one of those areas to try to get it right? Those are the five.

In this day and age, to add 26 players I think we added, that was an interesting -- I saw a little graph today of the players, but the combination of some of the junior college players that are clearly older, these guys that are a little older and more experienced, to be able to throw that in the pot with the guys that were back with us that had some grooming from last year and galvanized a little bit, that's -- those are the five things all in play.

Q. How does this Tennessee offense this season compare to the one you faced in 2022?

LINK JARRETT: It's probably not far off, is it? It's not. Damaging, threatening, physical, intense, balanced. Just pick whatever you want, man. I mean, I know what we're

walking into, and I know what we walked into in 2022.

I told the guys, and I'll tell them again: Once the game starts, it doesn't know. So our stats, their stats, the game doesn't know what's supposed to happen. You have to go manage and take charge of the game. There will be opportunities for that game to go one way or another. Either you're bringing your A stuff in the A moment or you're not, and the pendulum, it will go one way or another.

I know how good they are. They're unbelievable, unbelievably talented. This is a little bit of Clash of the Titans. I think our team, emotional team. This is an emotional group. Sometimes that emotion, we've seen it spill over a little bit where the guys hit a home run, the excitement, the punch-out. What you're going to see, I don't think we've ever seen it before. This Clash of the Titans, it's going to be exciting. People are looking forward to this. Our guys are looking forward to it. I know the Tennessee crowd is thrilled. I've seen how passionate they are. I think we have the best fans in the world, the pitch-by-pitch engagement.

This is top-of-the-food-chain stuff.

Q. It's a little bit of a weird schedule where you get an off day after you pitch. How do you set up your staff going forward in this tournament?

LINK JARRETT: Arnold will go, and then you're going to use some relievers you would think at some point in this thing. Maybe not. It would be great if we didn't.

But then you get to rest. So you can recalibrate guys that you may not be able to do so in back-to-back days of competition like this. So it's really neat. Again, I keep telling you, this is the best you're going to see the game played ever at this level. It hasn't been played better than this. You're also going to see that continue because the dynamic relievers that throw some but not too much, they're going to be right back out there.

So it's really neat. It's different. It's different. The number of guys that you use throughout the course of an ACC or an SEC weekend or a regional tournament or super regional, it may not get to that if things go really well for you. If your starter can get you some length and a reliever will get you to the finish line, if you can repeat that script, it might even be the same couple of relievers. Then how quickly can a starter within the realm of health and reality come back? All of those things are different here.

It's good, and it probably allows for even a better type of baseball.



Q. Link, you talked about Jamie. He has been incredibly consistent. A few of his best starts have been against some of the better offenses you have faced this season. I guess what about him -- does it seem like he rises to the occasion a lot? How have you seen his mentality on the mound evolve this year?

LINK JARRETT: His mentality has matured. He's matured in day-to-day work, realizing the trajectory and the potential. We had a serious heart-to-heart. Chuck and I sat down with him about halfway through last year. I wrote what I thought were the top left-handed arms looking forward to next year's draft. I just did it. Here we go. There's what we see right now. You either want to be in that conversation, and I don't know what to tell you the other side of this board is. I didn't write anything on it because there's nothing to write. You're either going to go in this direction or you'll go -- just to try to make him understand how good he could be at this.

The day-to-day arm care, strength and conditioning, conditioning, pitch shaping, flat groundwork, PFP work. When you start, you have six other days to manage the rest of your craft.

So I think just the maturity of ownership in all of that versus when you are excited to go out and throw and it's fun and it's Friday afternoon and here we go, there's more to it if you really want to be the best. 18-year-old kids don't really know all that yet. That's what they need us for to push them, and you have the support with Phil, the trainer, Jamie, the strength coach. Micah does a great job pitching management day-to-day stuff.

Use those resources, but the individual still has to own it and attack it and do it every single day with some intent and some energy. And he's done it. So then when he walks out there, you're starting to see a more physical kid, a more confident kid, a more determined kid. Fastball slider, the changeup is coming along. When do you use that changeup? I don't know. It seems like the fastball plays so well. Are you doing somebody a favor when you flip a changeup in there? It's a tricky piece to try to inject in there. We talk about it, work on it.

There's still more. But the growth and maturity and the outings have been really good. The matchup, sometimes you think with him, wow, that's a tough matchup, and he absolutely carves, and then other times it looks like a good matchup, and it's more of a dogfight from pitch one than you would think.

It's just part of it, but the maturity, the growth, the thoughtfulness of what he does, that's what stands out to me the most.

Q. The college baseball and Florida State community lost Mike Martin earlier this year. How does his legacy and how is it -- how is it personified on this team?

LINK JARRETT: I can hear his voice, and it probably talks to me more than any other athletically-minded voice could ever speak to me. Like, you hear a lot of people talk, and you think about things, and I've had other great coaches around me in my time, but I played for him, and I can hear his voice talk to me as a player. I can hear his voice talk to me as a young coach when I coached with him for one season.

I can hear his voice talking to his family.

So I learned so many different things from what is just a remarkable human being. He's an amazing person in my life. He was like a second father figure to me, and the times on the field and learning and the foundation of how to play the game at the college level, the college game is different. It's not Major League Baseball. This is different. It's not high school baseball.

Each one of those worlds has its own feel to it. Then there's recruiting and other things that go into it, but my foundation was laid in a lot of those areas by him, and I hear his voice. I hear his voice in games of thinking through maneuvers and bullpen management and defensive things and offensive parts of the game.

Then you have to evolve with your personality and style from your foundation and you're building off of what you learn initially. And then I'm different than -- there's only one of him. There's only one. I'm very fortunate to have been around him a lot, and I got to spend some time with him and some days where the decline was rapid, and I'm very fortunate that I did that. I can hear his voice in every different walk of my being. It's an important voice.

Q. With 11 in mind and what you talked about earlier, all the different angles that you have had as a player, coach, and as a dad, what are the major insights you pull out? What do you communicate to the different teams you bring here, and how do you communicate it?

LINK JARRETT: Well, when you talked about pitching -- if you start with baseball, pitching, defense, and base running. Then when you are playing, you are, like, hey, man, I want to hit too. When you look at it now, he knew if you could pitch, play defense, and run the bases, you were going to be in every single game. Every single game.

Offensively, to go further, you have to figure out a way

against the type of arms that we're going to deal with here. You'll have to figure out a way to scratch and claw and score. But the fundamental of pitching, defense, and base running, I can hear him say. You talk about voice. I can hear pitching, defense, and base running, that's what this is about.

I know why that was the case. So you can start with that. Now, I talk about 11 a lot, and part of the room that we have, which the tradition room, I have a TV that's dedicated solely to his story and his accolades and his life, and Carol is on there, when you go in there and push play, it will tell you the whole story.

So it's that important to me and to that program that we have one-fourth of the space dedicated to him and what he did there. That's going to stay right there. So everybody that walks in -- you want to walk in and hear it? There it is. And it runs. It's running. Like, he is on there, and his picture is there.

Now, I want to win it for him. Like, why as a player couldn't I get it done? It keeps me up. What did I not do? What were we not doing that kept us from that? Part of the reason the five program pieces, I was so determined to figure out myself what I needed to do to get it done here, did I ever think I would be sitting here coaching it? No. You don't think that that's going to happen. You really don't, but I owe it to the program, him, to figure out how to finish it.

So that's the messaging. Our guys were thrilled. Like, we're sitting there in the room, and I told them: When we walk out of this room and you get on that plane, there's 400 people standing along the sides of the bus. You're going to walk through that, and this will never be the same. Like, it's never -- so when we get up and leave, you're going to feel differently the moment you open that locker room door and off you go and here it starts.

In that corner in the cabinet trophy case there there's something missing. So I'm not happy to walk out through the people. That probably doesn't come off right. I'm happy to walk through to come where we are trying to take that bus and that plane, but I'm not happy with the result that I've had. So what do we do when we walk out of that room to enjoy those moments, but try to make sure that the result for us is just a little bit better and gets us that final trophy that is not sitting in that cabinet over there?

That is what all of that means to me and what I need to accomplish here to really feel that I've completed this.

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