

2024 Men's College World Series

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Press Conference



ANTHONY HOLMAN: I appreciate you all being here. I didn't think this would be this well attended and I'm pretty casually dressed. Don't tell my boss, but it's pretty hot out there.

We're excited to be back here in Omaha for the College World Series. Just a couple of highlights -- it's a state of baseball, so we'll talk a little bit about that. I wanted to highlight how successful the season has been and the coverage, not only during our Regionals and Super Regionals we've seen increased attendance across the board, but also during the regular season.

You'll talk to these coaches that are here as well as others that were members of the 64-field bracket that saw kind of -- I don't want to call it a resurgence, but a consistent theme around baseball and the coverage and the support that we're seeing at the collegiate level.

That's due to a number of reasons. To the coaching that's taking place. It's due to the performance of the young people that are competing. They're just so doggone good right now in terms of their athletic ability, their strength, their speed, their power, all those things. And the games are just so great to watch and so competitive.

And I think one of the concerns I had when I did assume this position a few years ago was were we losing kind of the next generation of fans because baseball can be kind of a long, drawn-out game. And I think some of the rule adjustments that we've seen have helped with pace of play.

Some of the game entertainment and engagement that we're seeing on campus during the regular season, certainly what we're doing around the College World Series

helps to keep those folks engaged and entertained as well.

So I'm here to say that the state of baseball is in good shape and we're excited to be a part of that.

MATT HOGUE: Thank you to everyone in this room. As Anthony said, our game is on an upward trajectory. Many of you are part of that and have contributed to that in the way you cover the game. There's so many outlets and pathways by which to keep up with college baseball now, and you're filling those tremendously. We appreciate your attendance today and certainly the efforts.

I'll echo Anthony, from our perspective, the committee, the job gets tougher every year. So many quality teams, so many schools that are taking college baseball seriously and investing in their programs. It becomes a razor-thin margin to make those hard decisions every season. Excited to watch the eight quality teams that have qualified.

And my impressions going through the Regionals and through the year, the state of the game is infectious. It's exciting right now. If you've watched these games, you've watched the impression on the faces of these players, the joy with which they're playing the game.

There have been some incredible moments, walk-offs, great catches. And that's what we want to see with this tournament, and certainly with this pinnacle event, one of the elite sporting events in the world here in Omaha is that type of joy that we're watching these guys play with.

There's a lot of cynicism right now in college athletics about a lot of topics. We all slice and dice those every day. When you get to the root of it, the competitive drive, the enjoy and the way these guys love playing the game is what really has struck me through the Regionals because you put all that stuff aside, you go on the field, you're still in between the lines with a ball and a glove. And it's been exciting to watch.

CRAIG KEILITZ: I'd like to echo what Matt and Anthony have said. It's easy to look at our sport and what's happening in college athletics right now and take that easy role to say it's the wild, wild west or things aren't going in

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the right direction.

Some of the things may not be, but I have faith that we have some leadership right now that can get us in the right direction. And I think Charlie Baker and Del Conte (phonetic) and Greg Sankey and Jim Phillips, we're going to be able to get through this and come out better, I think, once we have some clarity with this House case.

But the one thing I'd really like to reiterate, college baseball in my opinion has never been better with the attendance and certainly the TV viewership. But the play on the field is just absolutely incredible. We'll see that again this week as we've seen in the Regionals and the Super Regionals.

But we're going to take that next step. And we'll see how this plays out legislatively, if it's more scholarships, if we have different avenues, more fall games or so forth. But I think we're in a good position to take that next step and see what baseball can really become in college as great as it is right now. I'm excited about this week to showcase what baseball is all about.

JACK DIESING JR.: The College World Series of Omaha I think is representing the business community, and the city of Omaha couldn't be more thrilled to be part of this. So I appreciate being up here with all the people who actually make baseball happen, at least coordinate it throughout the country.

I'm president, chairman of the board of College World Series of Omaha, Inc. And joining me today is my daughter, Lisa, who is on the board and an executive committee and has been on the board for 10 years.

We at the College World Series of Omaha, Inc., for matter of information for everybody, we're a single-purpose, local organizing committee, nonprofit organization, consisting of 23 board members and four and a half staff members.

And our mission and vision, as you might imagine, as a single-purpose organization, is to be the facilitator of the local public/private partnership. So that includes working with the city, local business community, mecca, great university and the other stakeholders here in Omaha that are part of the contract and collaboratively with the NCAA in staging this very successful championship.

And 2025 will be the 75th playing of the College World Series here in Omaha. Some people thought it was going to be this year, but they forgot we didn't play during 2020.

And we're looking forward to that. As I think you all know it's been played on two fields since we've played here. We played at Rosenblatt for 60 years. That's certainly stood

the test of time and provided a great foundation for where we are today, which is in this state-of-the-art facility.

And I would just like to say that Omaha's relationship with college baseball and the NCAA and working together, the success we had putting on a successful College World Series and also building the stadium was the genesis of being able to sit down together and work out a very successful 25-year agreement with the NCAA to host this championship through 2036.

So we've still got a few years to go. The first 10, 11, 12 years have been pretty good here. We look forward moving that forward.

The plan is to have a "diamond" celebration, because 75 is the diamond anniversary, during this next year. And there will be more coming out of that after we finish this year's College World Series. We've got to get through this first. Talking about the events and I think we're going to celebrate what's going to happen leading up to the 75th.

The final thing I'd like to say is we love the College World Series. We love working with the NCAA. We love working with college baseball. Together we've created a great championship, and we're always looking to make it better. And I think it is getting better.

And I would just say that we're looking to continue this relationship long past 2036, but those discussions will be held at a later date. So we're looking forward to the future of college baseball.

Q. Mr. Holman, talk about the addition of Greg Seitz, who's a veteran, worked many NCAA events, how he will help the committee next year.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: Many might know, Greg is at Jacksonville State, and has been a veteran of NCAA committees for a number of years. He actually was the chair of our FCS, our Football Championship Series committee a few years ago.

He routinely volunteers and supports, assists us at our men's basketball Final Four and other championships. And his bowling team just won a national championship. Greg is well versed in the operations of NCAA Championships, understands kind of the processes that we follow.

And more than anything, as a sitting AD, he understands kind of what the experience needs to look like and feel like for our student-athletes. And that perspective and assistance is really valuable for staff and our committees and we welcome his appointment to the committee.



Q. Anthony, there's been a lot of discussion and almost controversy this year and the last few years about when you host a Regional and you have to be an away team on your home field. Are there future discussions regarding maybe modifying that rule or discussing?

ANTHONY HOLMAN: Your timing is great. I think we've got some spies in here because we were talking about this last night at dinner. Jay, our vice chair, who is on our committee, we talked about that last night. I'm sure it will be part of the committee's discussion going forward.

One of the things that I would share that's important to remember, and while our top 16 teams are typically afforded the opportunity to host, we have to draw a distinction between seeding and hosting. Because you play the season for the seed, and you earn that. But it's not fair, necessarily, to assign someone to a host site that's not going to provide a great experience for anybody that's coming there.

While that's the process that we're going in, we're letting folks know, on notice, that you still have to have a quality facility, have to have hotels that are in close proximity that we can have our teams play in. All those things are important to do it.

And does it make sense for -- does that home seed or that home team, having the additional advantage to reward them for their season makes sense? Potentially, so I think the committee will have some discussion about that, and you may see some movement on that going forward.

Q. Anthony, Matt and Craig, Matt, you mentioned how difficult it is for the committee to seed and select 64 deserving teams with those razor-thin projections on some that didn't quite get in. Craig mentioned that the game is growing and is becoming more popular. So my thought would be -- and maybe some other people might share this and maybe for discussions, would there be a situation before the end of the decade where we would have an expansion of 64 to maybe 72? And the idea would be to create something like a mini Dayton does in basketball where maybe there would be, let's say, four potential three seeds and four potential four seeds playing in order to get seeded into the tournament. Because some of these teams that are maybe on the bubble or knocking at the door, maybe don't have the competitiveness as some of the big conferences. And with more teams coming to the big conferences, how deep will the committee go a year from now and what's going to happen? That's just a vision of our discussion and might that happen?

MATT HOGUE: I think they maybe they were listening in last night, Anthony. Howard, how many World Series have you covered now?

Q. (Indiscernible) over 25 years.

MATT HOGUE: Congratulations. I know this has been a passion of yours for many years.

That's a topic that's right up there at the top of the list. I think we realize with the depth of teams now, the parity, the intersectional play that continues to increase each year -- we had teams in this regional that went out early in the season and didn't play at home for 15, 20 games so they could play the competition they felt they need to to strength their overall profile.

We are going to look at that further as a committee. You don't want to just put a number out there that is ironclad. I think at this point there are some issues, you've got to look at the math of it.

Baseball is unique in the fact that we play double elimination, which I think is something that's important and is the essence of how this sport has worked for many years. So my personal opinion is I'd still like to see that be part of the structure.

But yes, I think that's something that we hear a lot and is a topic being discussed significantly. What that format is, we'll have to take some time to really look at that. But it is evolving and I think we're seeing every year there are deserving teams that can definitely make a run through the Regional.

Q. Craig or Anthony, every year, of course, there's hot tensions in the NCAA Tournament. That's happened again this year. Where do you feel the state of umpire/coach/player relationships are? And what steps do you feel need to be taken to improve those kinds of relationships and on-field communication and all the rest of that?

CRAIG KEILITZ: That's a tough question. There's no easy answer for that. We do have our coaches/umpires relationship committee. We meet at the convention every year and talk through issues, how you communicate to one another.

It works both ways. Some of the things coaches say to the umpires should never be said, and probably not as much vice versa. But to understand where they're coming from, the heat of competition, there's always going to be something like that. But you hate to see that, and I think you're probably referring to the Clemson game and how

that went down.

I don't know if there's an easy answer to that. I really don't have an answer for it. But we look at it every year and talk about how we treat one another, how we talk to one another. But when it's between players, I think it just happens occasionally, unfortunately.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: The number of officials that -- I'm calling them officials because, I know this is about baseball, but across the board we're seeing drastic decreases in individuals that want to take up officiating as an avocation. The drastic differences from 20 years ago, the numbers are crisis level, candidly. And the number one reason we hear from officials that are leaving the game is because of treatment -- not just from coaches but from fans and parents. This is from youth on up.

So this is our platform, so I'm going to say it. We've got great coaches here. And their livelihoods depend on that. Heat of the battle, all those things are important. But one of the things that we are teaching in the training as a part of officiating across all sports is conflict resolution. It's not just balls and strikes. It's not just the rules. It's about how do you interact, how do you talk to other people.

I challenge my coaches and administrators and others to do the same thing. No one's perfect. No one is great. But the discourse has to get better. It has to get better from both sides. And we should challenge and push all of our stakeholders to do that.

MATT HOGUE: I would just add the data also suggests this year, as we looked through the umpiring and going through that process for the Regionals, the ejections and suspension number actually went down considerably from the year before, maybe almost by half.

CRAIG KEILITZ: 47 percent.

MATT HOGUE: So there's some traction there that's taking place. Certainly that doesn't ameliorate maybe an incident that is seen by many eyes. But when you start looking at the data, what Anthony is talking about is working.

CRAIG KEILITZ: The instant replay has helped out on that as well, knowing they're going to get it right.

Q. What do you all see right now just overall with the biggest obstacle to growth in college athletics, in the sport? You talked a little bit about baseball growing, you talked about the officiating problems. What's the biggest obstacle?

CRAIG KEILITZ: I'm not sure I truly understand the question. Growth in what way?

Q. (Indiscernible)?

CRAIG KEILITZ: Instability right now and understanding where we're going. So, for example, talking with coaches right now, for '25-'26 they don't know how many scholarships they'll probably have, what their roster size is going to be. Do we have the 25 percent minimum scholarship allotment? Do we have a maximum 27 student-athletes on aid? And they're trying to sign, really, two to three classes out.

You put that in with the Major League draft, the transfer portal. So there's just instability. I think once we get through that and have clarity, I think we can build off of everything after that.

MATT HOGUE: I don't know if it's a significant obstacle, but I think certainly there's a desire to make the game more known in regions maybe that are not as well represented.

You've certainly got some coaches and some programs out there that they try to get past that trend. But everything that happens with this tournament tries to take the entire country into play, even the selection of the umpires. We take a look at every conference, every region, that sort of thing.

But the encouragement, and I think Craig would agree with this, but the encouragement that some of those programs continue to investment in the game, support the game, grow it in those regions, particularly now that we're seeing virtually no geographic bounds for how conference realignment is set up.

Q. You have all these traditional powerhouses come to Omaha on repeat visits. How important, how excited are you to see a program like Kentucky, first time in program history, to be here in the mix?

JACK DIESING JR.: Glad to participate. I think it's always great. I wouldn't call Kentucky an underdog, but it's always good to have a new face, a new team that hasn't been here before.

But we support all the teams. And this is one of the things that makes Omaha special over the years: We do our best to make every team feel like they're the home team, for the most part -- depends on who gets here.

But I think it's great, and we have an event that's supported by -- it's a family-friendly event. It's affordable for kids and everything. And seeing new teams here brings new people

to the stadium and helps with a lot of things, attendance and growing the sport.

I think the other thing, I would say, we have a thousand Little League teams that come here. You have a new team like Kentucky that some of these kids might have a relationship with, and it gets them here, too. So, it just further, talking about growing the sport, all that helps grow the sport.

Q. Anthony and Craig, I want to ask around the relationship you guys have with USA Baseball and MLB, and just around the length of what MLB is doing with the draft, the Northwoods League, how do you see those leagues in the summer be such a push for the development of guys coming into the fall for all the respectable programs at -- the power 4s come next year, mid-majors also, and USA Baseball building a lot of angles with having the Friendship Series between top countries like Chinese Taipei and Japan down in Cary? What does it mean to see that and have the top players play on the CNC USA team?

ANTHONY HOLMAN: First with USA Baseball, our Division II championship is held in Cary at USA Baseball's headquarters there. So our relationship is really strong. We have representation on their board. Oftentimes I send Randy, I don't go, but Randy represents us.

But two things specifically that we're doing with both USA Baseball and Major League Baseball, we've got D.J. is here from our staff. But we've coordinated kind of annual meetings with those folks. And we're talking about a few different things -- rules across the board, kind of development in play, officiating -- some commonalities that we all see and utilize.

Now, in terms of, kind of, international play and the friendlies, we don't get into that, candidly. Craig may be able to speak about that more and some of the coaches involved.

Ours is around common rules, development, officiating, and we've got some common space in there, and we also have some other things in the hopper with U.S.A. Baseball that I hope to be able to announce here next year when they join us on the dais.

But really close relationships and I think that's only been strengthened in recent years by some of our staff members who have helped facilitate that.

CRAIG KEILITZ: Our relationship with the ABCA and our coaches really revolve closely with Major League Baseball. As we've had more success putting guys into the Major

Leagues, faster, staying longer, making more money over their careers, I think that the relationship continues to get stronger.

The reduction of the draft from 40 to 20, and then the one year when it went down to five during COVID has really helped push more kids into college baseball. And then over the last couple of years Skenes, Langford from Florida and Neto from Campbell going right up to the Major Leagues with just a couple days in the minor leagues was, really, I think a great testament to the level of baseball that we have in college and the level of development with our coaches.

We run our national convention every year around the country. We're in a different city each year, but we have 528 pro coaches that are part of our association that come to our convention yearly.

That says a lot about what they think about our techniques, our clinics, the development of our coaches. So I think we keep getting closer and closer as our coaches go from college to pros and pros back to college. So we keep getting closer.

And I think myself and Rob Manfred and certainly USA Baseball, we're all in this together to grow the sport around the world and certainly in our country. So we feel really good about our relationships with both.

Q. Anthony, Matt or Craig, with the House settlement, the framework that's come out so far. I know there's still a lot of questions to be asked, but how confident are you that the tournament can remain how it is under the new framework that's been proposed? Craig, is there a consensus among coaches on what they prefer as player cap, roster cap?

CRAIG KEILITZ: There's certainly consensus on that. They'd like more.

So that 40 has been great for developing student-athletes, giving students an opportunity to compete for their dream.

Certainly the transfer portal has changed that to build stability. There's so many factors with that. Our coaches would like 40, but they understand if that scholarship limit is determined by whatever that roster size is, they know there's pinches on campus. As that comes forward, and we're going to have revenue sharing, that there's going to be money taken out, we've got to give on that. The coaches and players need to understand it.

But we do need to have a roster size that's conducive to great baseball but also safety factors. You can't have 25,



30 kids on a team knowing that you have three, four, five, six injuries at any one time. And it could be in your pitching staff and all of a sudden you can't fill a rotation. Those are some things we'll have to work out, and I feel confident we'll be able to state our case on what that number is.

For example, most of the teams are playing between 28 and 32. But to get to that 28 and 32, you almost need 40 as you work backwards with injuries, and there's academic issues or problems at home to try to figure out what that number is to put together a legitimate baseball team.

So we'll work closely with our athletic directors to make sure that we have something that works for both sides.

MATT HOGUE: I think it's still evolving. Interesting to see. Great question, by the way, how it all sorts out.

But ultimately, I think it's going to have a positive effect on the game. Those who are fully involved in college baseball, I wouldn't expect that they're going to stop being fully involved, but maybe the parameters change what that means.

But if you think about it, it's going to increase, potentially, the amount of financial aid that's going to be available, if we do see a system that's ratified such as that.

That's more opportunities. For college baseball, as we all know has been plagued by that 11.7 number. We've heard about that for so many years. That creates a very tricky puzzle for athletes, families, institutions, how they make it all work.

I think we'll see a positive outcome from that standpoint. Anytime you have this type of change, there could be some mixed bag about that.

We certainly hope that those that have programs and are invested in the programs will continue to do that. But I think they will. I think as Craig says, the mosaic's going to change maybe within that institution or that campus, but as we're seeing today, and with this event, this sport is right up there at the top of interesting commitment for institutions as high as any sport out there.

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