

2024 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Mitchell Daly

Johnny Hummel

Press Conference



Having this first practice has been a surreal moment for all of us. We've worked so hard to get to this position, and we're just ready to go out there, compete, and hopefully bring home a national championship.

Q. Mitchell, you've been here before. What are you instilling to the younger guys, and how is it different this time?

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, definitely. Coach Ming, after we won the super, just brought everybody together, and we just talked about what to expect and a lot of moments that we're grateful for this season.

One of the things I kind of just told a lot of the younger guys is to appreciate this because for a lot of them it's their first college season, and my first time here I was a freshman as well. I really didn't appreciate how hard it is to get here.

It took not going for me to really be, like, wow, this is special. That's just what I've tried to tell them is just appreciate the moment, take everything in, and don't take it for granted.

Q. You go through the SEC grind. Could you talk a little bit about how that prepares you, and also you get here, and are you happy to see three SEC teams on your side of the bracket, or a little bit disappointed that you have to continue that same grind?

JOHNNY HUMMEL: No, we're not disappointed at all. We're just happy to be here.

We're going to stay with us and play our game and go out there and compete how we know how to compete.

Whoever is on the other side, it's all right. We're just ready to get out there on the field come Saturday and start playing.

Q. Can you speak to how it prepares you playing in the SEC for being on this stage?

JOHNNY HUMMEL: The SEC is the best conference in

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Omaha. Can you please give us an opening statement, Coach?

NICK MINGIONE: Thank you. This is the place we want to be, and every year this is the goal to make it here and then to win a national championship. So we're a handful of wins away from that. We're excited. We're thankful.

We're a team that has really earned this and done something that no Kentucky team has ever done. Just thankful for this group of men, these two guys to my left, our fan base, and everybody else. We're just super excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. Last time we spoke to you guys you were still riding high from the super regional win. Now that you are actually on site, what is your mindset? Have you calmed down a little bit? Are you more excited than ever?

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, I would say we're all just ready to get playing. You know, I think definitely this first practice knocked the jitters off for a lot of people. I think everybody was just excited to get on the field, feel the dirt, see the scenery around.

Everybody is just ready to go, I would say, is a great word -- great phrase to describe it.

JOHNNY HUMMEL: Our whole entire staff and our whole entire players were super excited to come here. It felt like a dream come true to all of us.



Division I baseball; so competing against these other teams that we're going to play on our side of the bracket has really helped us. We've competed against I think two of them that are in our bracket. Maybe one of them. I don't really remember the bracket because I'm just taking all this in right now.

I know there's one of the teams that we've already played. Being able to play them again maybe is just going to help us because we know the ins and outs, and we're also just going to play our game.

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, sure. I would say in the SEC it feels like almost every game is a playoff atmosphere, playoff mentality going into it. Every game is a grind. I don't think we're expecting anything less than that in this journey throughout playoffs and now into Omaha.

We know that every team here is good. They're going to give us their A-game. We're prepared for that, and we're excited.

Q. Mitchell, I remember talking to you when you were at Texas before you made it here, and there was confidence among that ball club that you would make it to Omaha. Has there been a similar confidence on this team?

MITCHELL DALY: Oh, yeah. I think I told Coach, you know, the day I got here when I looked around the locker room and saw the pieces that we had, I was confident that this was an Omaha-caliber team. The whole team is just a bunch of winners, just a bunch of competitors, guys who do whatever it takes to win. That's really been our identity all year is just doing whatever it takes to win and being on the attack.

I wasn't surprised when we won the super and now that we're here, and I know that these guys aren't satisfied.

Q. What's your impression of the playing field? The dimensions are pretty similar to Kentucky Proud Park. The turf is obviously a little bit different. Do you think that plays into an advantage, disadvantage for your team?

MITCHELL DALY: No, we play on a lot of natural surfaces all year long in the SEC. So bouncing back and forth, it's obviously different, but it's something that we prepare for. Coach Ming and the rest of the coaching staff prepares us for.

Like you said, KPP plays big too, and so that's just kind of we know how to do what we need to do as an offense to adjust for that, so...

Q. This is for both Mitchell and Johnny. Coach Ming talked about that specific time during the year when he went to third base, and he said a switch was flipped. From a player's perspective, did you all feel that? How much change in mood and momentum did you feel when that change was made?

NICK MINGIONE: I actually made the change in '22, so I actually started this year at third, so...

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah. So he's been at third the whole time I've been here. But just his energy that he brings, just doing, like we said, we don't move. He does whatever we ask -- whatever he asks of us, he is for sure doing the same. You won't see him moving on a foul ball coming towards him, and we appreciate that because we know that he's in the fight with us, so...

NICK MINGIONE: If I could just share a couple of thing about these guys. This is what's so amazing about college baseball now. When you think about Johnny Hummel, a little over a year ago he was at a Division II school closing out baseball games and enters his name into the transfer portal, and we ended up watching his video and seeing him and liking him.

I remember Jake Scott seeing him and talking to Will and us starting to recruit him. Think about, wow, he was at a Division II school, and I remember watching him and looking in the stands, and with all due respect, there was some times I think I could count seven to eight people.

Then I remember earlier in the year we went to Ole Miss, and Johnny closed out the game, and after the game his eyeballs are, like, popping out of his head. He is just like, and I'm like, Great job, Johnny. He's like, Thanks, Coach. He is, like -- his mouth was, like -- do you remember that?

JOHNNY HUMMEL: I remember that.

NICK MINGIONE: It was like, That was awesome. That was awesome.

He closed out the game. To your point earlier about the SEC preparing us for this, it's pretty amazing to think about a guy that believed in himself so much that he would come to Kentucky. When the game and our season and everything was on the line to have our first trip, Johnny Hummel was the guy who came in and threw three straight strikes when we needed it the most.

Then you think about Mitch's journey. Mitch came from a Power Five school in Texas. Might be the biggest winner in all of college baseball. In his four years of college

baseball, he has been to two trips to Omaha and two super regionals. So all four years that guy has played and helped lead a team to a super regional. Might be the biggest winner of are all of college baseball.

When you think about the landscape of college baseball now where we have an opportunity to connect two guys to share in an experience and to do something that's never been done in Kentucky baseball history is kind of cool. It's kind of neat to think that they can come from totally different parts of our country, totally different paths and stories, and this team is filled with people like Johnny Hummel and Mitch Daly who are just amazing people, just true winners and will do whatever it takes to help Kentucky win.

These guys have played major roles, and it's just kind of neat to know their story. I often said, maybe when this season is over, what was it, the Paul Harvey deal, "The Rest of the Story." There's a lot of "rest of the stories" about this Kentucky team, and these are two of the very special ones that we have.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you. Open it up for questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, first trip here to Omaha as a coach. First trip for Kentucky. Were there some coaches and mentors that you reached out to to talk a little bit about this trip and making this trip a little bit easier for you and your staff and the players?

NICK MINGIONE: You know, in 2013 I had the opportunity to come here with Mississippi State and having played for the national championship and making it to the final series where there was two teams, it was, like, whoa. You know, prior I've reached out to a couple of friends and people that have been here more recently because if my math is right, what was that, 11 years ago. That was before this little dude was even born. Life has changed since then.

But I just remember coming here and just thinking about there's a lot of things going on, and rightfully so. This is the mecca of college baseball. I just remember just even reflecting and talking to some folks that have been here since then just about how to try to stay focused on the task at hand.

It is a very similar message to our team. You'll be pulled in a lot of directions, but we have to keep the main thing the main thing. This team has done a great job of that all year, but to be able to stay focused on the task at hand, and that's to try to bring Kentucky its first-ever college baseball national championship.

Q. What stands out to you? What do you remember the most about Robert Hogan's recruitment and how he has developed this year? And then what experience and leadership has he been able to bring with that deep run he had here in 2022?

NICK MINGIONE: The thing I remember about Robert Hogan is watching him on Synergy, and earlier in the year watching and seeing a player with tremendous energy and excitement and confidence. Then when you fast-forward to some of his outings after, it didn't look like the same guy.

I remember looking at him and watching him on video and noticing that he had two bracelets on his glove hand. I remember asking him, like, during the recruiting process, Hoky, what are your bracelets?

He said, Well, there's a guy at Texas A&M, a really great guy, who had autism. One of them is for him, and another one is a bracelet about my faith.

I said, Really? I said, The bracelet about autism, was it somebody that wore glasses?

He is, like, Yeah.

I said, Was his name Zach?

He goes, Coach, I think it might be.

Then I pulled up a slide in my PowerPoint, and I said, Is it this guy?

He is, like, Yes, that's Zach.

Well, we had met Zach in 2018 when we were at the Minute Maid Classic. He became a dear friend of mine and our program. We immediately connected on that.

Then we connected on the faith piece, and I just remember talking to him and just really just mentoring him that night about how his identity is not wrapped up in this sport, and it cannot be no matter what. Like, you are Robert Hogan, who happens to play baseball. You're not Robert Hogan, a baseball player. We just connected.

Believe it or not, by the time we hung up on that conversation, it was very shortly after he became a Wildcat. I feel like with all my heart this is exactly where God wanted Hoky.

To watch his development just from the time he first got here to somebody that was lost, trying to find his way and lacking confidence, to a guy that is now standing on the mound who acts like he owns the place and can pitch and

get outs in the biggest moment is really what's cool about coaching. As important as this is and the trophy and everything else, I really believe that Kentucky has changed his life. That means more to me than maybe anything.

Q. I'm also a native Westchester County, White Plains, New York. Westchester in the house, 914. What's it like to see guys like Ryan, Robert, just be commanding on the pitching staff, let alone of filling you guys into the rotation or just frontlining certain innings for your relief pitchers and let alone on the offensive side, guys like Nick, Ryan, and Mitch, how do you feel those type of players can get an offense going when either some innings of mishaps happen or what other chemistry those guys feel throughout the clubhouse?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, I can tell you, I want to give Nick Ammirati, one of our assistants, a lot of credit for the job that he's done for our team offensively, and Austin Cousino, who it's his first year on our staff. He's one of our greatest players of all time.

Those players you just mentioned are really good players, and the thing about them is they can help us beat teams in a lot of different ways. So some of the guys you mentioned, they're able to steal a base if the pitcher is not where he needs to be with his break time, and the catcher's arm is not where it's supposed to be, then we have the ability to steal a base. Those guys have the ability to hit the ball out of the yard and have the ability to go first to third and score from first on a double and lay down a bunt.

We're at our best when we do what the game demands at that time, and those guys you just mentioned, they're fully capable of doing a lot of those different things.

It would be much like a basketball player who is multi-dimensional. Much like a football player who can really make a lot of things happen, and he is not one-dimensional, and a lot of guys you mentioned, they can certainly do that.

Q. This is for your assistant over here. What's been your favorite moment of the season?

REEVES MINGIONE (Coach Mingione's son): I would probably say just watching him celebrate after a win. It's just kind of fun just to watch what they do. Like just go crazy and have all the emotions that they need to have.

Q. (Off microphone)?

REEVES MINGIONE (Coach Mingione's son): Either a dog pile or when they run around the field.

Q. Nick, congratulations on your second Coach of the Year honor. You have two of them now bookending your head coaching career. I kind of sense the second one means a little bit more to you. If that's true, can you explain to us why it may?

NICK MINGIONE: John, thank you for being here, by the way. I was naive. My first year, win SEC Coach of the Year, National Coach of the Year, I would be lying if I wasn't, like, man, that was a little easier than I thought, and boy, was I wrong.

I hope you appreciate my transparency because this game in life will humble you in a second, as you know. The thing I've learned about these awards are they really are team awards, and I congratulated our staff because that is an award you legitimately could not do by yourself.

All the time and effort that we're spending preparing for our next game and our opponents and all the time and effort on the phone recruiting and evaluating and doing all these things, it really is a team award.

Really the thing that it means to me is I have surrounded myself with amazing people. I really have. You do not win this award unless you are just covered and surrounded by amazing people. It starts with my wife and my son, and it goes all the way down to our coaches and strength coaches and athletic trainers, our student managers, our athletic director, our administration, our fans.

You cannot do that. There is no way. There is no way that you can ever win one of those awards without having yourself being surrounded with amazing people. I've done a lot of things wrong as a head coach, and I make mistakes. And I'm sure I'll make a mistake in this College World Series, but I have absolutely hit a grand slam or threw a perfect game or whatever you want to say with the people I've surrounded myself with.

I do want to say this. If you can put this out, this would mean a lot to me. If the people of Omaha are looking for a team to root for, this is your team. This is your team. We are the first-timers. We want to have a great experience. We want to be lifted up. I've seen this city, and I've seen the people of this place lift up opposing teams. I've watched this thing over and over.

If they're looking for a team that competes at the highest level and has an amazing time doing it, we would love for you to jump on board. There are so many seats on the Kentucky bandwagon. We would love -- we have Eli Small, who is from Elkhorn. He's a Nebraska guy who just loves this place. We talk about bringing him home all year.



If you can hear my voice and see this video, whatever, and you are, like, I wonder who I'm going to root for, let it be the Cats. Thank you. Go, Cats.

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