

2024 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Jim Schlossnagle

Gavin Grahovac

Jace LaViolette

Press Conference



because we're on a bigger stage or a bigger field or you perceive it to be bigger. We have to put it in perspective and realize that it's still baseball. It's still a game. We just have to play our best.

Q. Gavin, Jace, obviously the loss to Braden early in the super regional, how do you guys rebound from that, and how do you rally around him?

JACE LaVIOLETTE: You never want to see anybody go down like that, but especially Braden right there. That was really tough. Even in the moment that was really, really, really hard for the dugout to kind of stay in. You kind of felt the dugout kind of -- it was like we had something in our stomach. You could feel it, right?

We just kind of had to realize what was important. We always say what's important now, right? The most important thing right there was winning that ball game.

Now we have to look at it like, I mean, I think the whole team has the utmost trust in every single person that comes off the bench. We all know we're ready to play.

We've put everything that we possibly can into this team and into making -- honestly, making it what we have so far.

I feel really good. I would be foolish if I was up here saying we won't miss him, because obviously we will. He is a big part of why we're here. But Kaeden Kent is unbelievable, as you all saw. So I feel super confident.

GAVIN GRAHOVAC: It's tough to lose a guy like Braden. Great teammate, great person. Built a great relationship with him. He'll continue to be a great teammate as we continue to go through this journey.

Every guy has to step up now. So whoever is coming off the bench is going to play. Like you saw the other day, Kaeden Kent, big swing, big plays. We're going to have a great time, and Braden is going to be here with us.

Q. Ryan was here two years ago. Is there anything that he has passed on about how you handle Omaha?

THE MODERATOR: Coach, can you give us an opening statement?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Yeah. Excited. Excited to be in Omaha. Excited to represent the 12th Man Texas A&M University here in the College World Series. Seems like we just started practice a couple of weeks ago, but it also feels like a long trip.

So had a great practice, and looking forward to staying here as long as we can to win a national title.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Gavin and Jace, you got through your first practice out there. How do you get back to the normalcy and start playing, this is just a baseball weekend? There's lots of lights, lots of media. How do you go out there and just prepare as if it's a baseball game?

GAVIN GRAHOVAC: It's going to have the same mentality we've had all year. Opening day, every day. Go out there, might be a new field, big field, big stage, but just go out there and play our game and have fun.

JACE LaVIOLETTE: I'm kind of all about living in the moment. I kind of took today in, and it was pretty surreal. It's my first time ever being here. His first time ever being here. It was really surreal. It was a really cool moment.

Obviously, it's really cool to be here. You just have to treat it like we treated, as he said, opening day, right? We have to realize that we got here because we had a standard, and we got here because we had things that we believe in, and we can't start going away from those things just



JACE LaVIOLETTE: Honestly, he just told me to have fun. A lot of people try and make it seem like it's -- like you shouldn't really enjoy it. It's still baseball. I just said that earlier, but like, especially days like today, tomorrow I'm definitely going to come watch a game. Why not? You have to enjoy it while you're here.

Then he was just like, once it's time for the game, then you can realize, okay, it's just baseball. But while we're here and not playing necessarily and we're practicing and everything, there's time to take it in and realize, hey, this is one of the biggest stages in college -- this is the biggest stage in college baseball.

You just kind of have to let it sink in.

GAVIN GRAHOVAC: Yeah, Ryan and coaches have done a great job preparing us when we got here. A few days, take it all in, enjoy every moment, take pictures, go on your phone, whatever it is.

When it's time to step on those lines, you got to come ready to play, and that's what we plan on doing.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you for your time.

Questions for Coach.

Q. You have four guys who are the first four in A&M history to come to two College World Series. What does it mean for the program and what does it mean for them and what you are trying to build so that they can have that experience?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Yeah, it means a lot. That's a great point that the more often you go, the more used to being here that a team is, and you have somebody other than a coach that can talk to you about their experience, whether it be on or off the field. Between Prager and Cortez and Rudis, I guess, Targac would be the other one, it's awesome have that come from players instead of -- it's like hearing from your dad all the time. They hear from me all the time, but it's better when it comes from a player.

Hopefully we can continue that to where we always have that kind of experience on our club.

Q. How did you approach Jac Caglianone last time you saw them in the regular season as a hitter? And what do you do? What can you do tomorrow night? What do you think of his season that he has had, the career that he has had?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Yeah, first of all, he's a great player, right? It is what it is. I think the key -- one of our

coaches was talking about how we're going to try X or Y to pitch with him. I said, just make sure there's nobody on base. That's the key is to make sure there's nobody on base.

We tried -- we went four outfielders. It really doesn't matter. If he hits it in the air, it's going to go over the fence most of the time. The thing about Jac that -- I don't know Jac, and I have a lot of admiration for him. The thing that -- he's the best defensive first baseman I've ever seen in college baseball. It's not close. I've coached some good ones and coached two USA Teams that had good ones. He's an unbelievable defender that can also -- I think he can go to the outfield.

He made catches against us in Gainesville where he ran all the way down -- up against the fence and dodged the ballboy and caught one up against the fence and then did the exact same thing in the SEC tournament.

He changes the game with his glove. Not as much as he does with his bat, but he's a complete player. He's looking to do damage from the first pitch, so you can't go slowly into the at-bat. You have to be super intentional. But I can tell you this. He's a great player, but when we went down there and lost two out of three the beginning of the conference play, it was the other guys that beat us.

I went into it thinking about Cags and Colby Shelton and those guys, and then it was Heyman and the other dudes, the right-handed hitters that were smoking the ball all over the field.

They're a great team, as I just told Sully. Death, taxes, and Florida in Omaha. Those are three things you can pretty much count on. Hopefully we can get our program to that point, but Cags is -- you can only control so much, so just try to have him hit with nobody on.

Q. You have a ton of transfers that all seem to just mesh really well. What's kind of been the secret behind that, or what have you kind of done to help them mesh?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: I think any coach would tell you you have a strong culture. And Texas A&M, as a university, leads itself to have -- Texas A&M stands for something, and it stands for a lot.

There's a culture there that is not just in the baseball program or the athletic department. It's on the campus. It attracts a certain person that if you don't live up to that standard, you're not around.

I think the transfers we've gotten, they're all high-character



kids from high-character families, and they've also come from great places. For example, Braden Montgomery, David Esquer deserves a lot of credit for his development. The coaches at Penn, the coaches at Columbia, the coaches at Michigan.

Those guys are all -- they're coming from great programs where they've been held to a high standard anyway, and knock on wood, we get to reap the benefits of that in today's college baseball. It has way more to do with where they came from versus necessarily anything we've done other than just welcome them with open arms and hold them to a standard.

Q. What would you attribute the slow starts for Ryan the last couple of games?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Prager?

Q. Yeah.

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Ryan doesn't have -- like, he doesn't have overpowering stuff in terms of big, big velocity. He relies on command and pitch execution.

I think anybody can have a bad day, and he's had not horrible, but just a couple of bad ones, which in my mind just means he's due to have a great one.

Our ballpark is not the most forgiving park when you are a guy that -- like the game against Hagen Smith, I mean, the fact that he was able to match him was unbelievable because we were going to have to play way more defense than they were going to have to play because Prager is not normally a big strikeout pitcher. The ball gets put in play a lot, just hopefully weakly.

So in this ballpark -- I looked at the weather, and I think the wind is going to be blowing in Saturday night with a little front coming through. We're a team that the home run is a big part of our offense, but maybe it will help us keep -- help us keep Florida in the ballpark.

To answer your question, Prager just -- he doesn't have to be perfect, but he can't get away with bad pitches really too often.

Q. I want to ask you about the traditions at A&M. I know the school itself has all of its traditions. The baseball team has a ton of traditions around it. Each year you guys have your own unique ones. You had the Pringles, the Whammy Wagon. Now it's "Rattlin' Bog." What are the unique things about each team? Why do you do it, and what makes it so special?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: First of all, I have nothing to do with any of them. Pringles came out of just a speech when I was mad at the team. That wagon thing, that was LaViolette coming up, and "Rattlin' Bog" was LaViolette and Schott.

I think baseball lends itself to that. You have so much free time. You play every day. It's even more so in professional baseball. So you come up with something to break the -- I guess you would call it monotony, but just something to keep everybody positive.

There's a lot of failure in baseball. You need something to bring the guys back to neutral and keep them positive and keep them uplifted. I think baseball players tend to do that more often than other sports.

I think if you went around every successful team, they have something, and it just so happens that A&M, we're such a big school in the SEC with a lot of eyes on you, it just gets -- and the 12th Man, everybody kind of catches on with whatever the team is doing.

I think what is unique about A&M is the connection between the team and the fans. So if we get it going and if it's good or if it's Pringles or if it's whatever, then the connection between the team and any sport at A&M and the 12th Man, the true connection of that, you don't have at every school, that's what breeds itself to make it become so popular because the fans are part of the team, and the team are part of the fans.

Q. You talked a few weeks ago about how your heart rate changes when different pitchers pitch. Chris Cortez has had an incredible season. How has that side of it changed?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Gotten better. Gotten a lot better. Yeah, Cortez has earned that. So Chris has really done well. It's good to see him confident, positive, believing in himself.

Chris is a guy that cares. Sometimes he over-cares. He wants to please so much that if he just makes a little bit of a mistake in his previous days he would let that snowball into something else. And now he's truly playing pitch-to-pitch, doesn't look at the scoreboard, doesn't worry about the last pitch. He is focused on the next pitch. He's matured a lot.

Q. Your team went 30-2 in the SEC tournament and then turned around and has gone active straight to get here. Was that a turning point for your team that's had a good season and then a mini wake-up call saying we have to turn it on right now?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: I think if you followed our season, it wasn't just the SEC tournament. It was really our last three weeks of the season wasn't great, but, you know, there's blessings in everything.

I think when you had a chance to reset, had a chance to get home and get rested, get out of the heat a little bit, not play as many games in Hoover. Last year we played Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday in Hoover, six straight games. We played nine SEC games in 11 days, all of them on the road before we went to the regional. Thankfully we were at Stanford where the weather was awesome, and we got the two hours back of sleep.

We were pretty out of gas. This year we got to go home early from the tournament, play at home. That definitely had a role.

I don't know. Wake-up call? I think our team is motivated. I wasn't worried about that. It was more about getting the rest and recovery going into the postseason.

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