

2024 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Florida Gators

Coach Kevin O'Sullivan

Jac Caglianone

Brandon Neely

Colby Shelton

Press Conference



JAC CAGLIANONE: Yeah. The biggest thing for me in kind of this whole group has been playing for each other to get to this point. We kind of bought into wanting the team's success over individual success, and that's just kind of what's propelled us and motivate the us to get to where we are now.

Q. Jac and Brandon, can you just talk about what it actually means to get back here and have a shot at redemption at winning the title?

JAC CAGLIANONE: Yeah. I mean, this is what you work for all year. Coming up one game short last year put a chip on our back, so we wanted to return. Having another shot at it is something we don't take for granted. We're thankful to be here and excited to play here.

BRANDON NEELY: Pretty much what he said. Coming in one game short last year, and all fall leading up to this year we've all been grinding and trying to get back to where we left off last year. Falling one game short last year has motivated a bunch of us coming back and a bunch of people coming into this program as freshmen and Colby and wanting to play here coming to the big stage, so yeah.

Q. Jac, can you speak to your experience, your improvement offensively from a year ago to this year and what's been the key for you to improve the way that you have?

JAC CAGLIANONE: Yeah, just focusing on staying in the zone, staying with what I know I can handle. That's been the biggest thing. Not being upset with talking walks is one thing that I wanted to work on this offseason. Kind of really just buying into the approach that, at the end of the day, I just want to win. So focusing on that has kind of cleared pretty much all the other stuff up.

Q. Jac, what would you tell some of the other guys about playing in this ballpark, what it's like? What are some of the messages you're going to try to pound home to maybe some of the guys that haven't played here before?

JAC CAGLIANONE: Yeah. I mean, it's different, but it's

THE MODERATOR: Coach, opening statement, please.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Just it's great to be back once again. Obviously our road to this point has been a little bit different. It seems like we've been on the road forever. I think it's been six straight weeks or so. Georgia, then Hoover, and obviously went to Stillwater and Clemson and now Omaha.

Difficult road, but these guys fought through it. Like I said, we're excited to be here.

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

Q. Jac, could you kind of discuss the advantages, if there are, of having experience? You have six or seven everyday guys that were here a year ago.

JAC CAGLIANONE: Yeah, I think that's huge. At the beginning of the year, we just wanted to get back here. So having guys who have played here and kind of know what it's like with the atmosphere and stuff, I think it's just going to play in our favor.

Q. Jac, like Coach just described, the travels that you devise have had over the past month, you probably have to really enjoy being around each other and enjoy playing the game in order to make it through that. What have you seen from yourself, and maybe also for Brandon or Colby, what have you seen in yourself that has allowed you to enjoy it this time, maybe more so than in the past, if that's, in fact, the case?



nothing we're not used to. Being in the SEC, everywhere you travel to has a packed-out crowd. That's a basic environment. Clemson this past weekend was probably one of the loudest places we've played at so far.

When we were on the field when Oral Roberts hit the walk-off homer last year, and that's probably the loudest I have ever heard a stadium. Yeah, it's just one of those things that these guys need to realize. There's only eight teams playing in college baseball now. So it's an honor. It's a privilege. It's something we don't take for granted.

Q. Colby, when you transferred to Florida, this is kind of the standard. Now you're here in Omaha. What is it like to walk out on the field today and realize that you guys are one of the last eight teams playing?

COLBY SHELTON: Yeah. Very eye-opening. This is a very cool stadium, and just to be in Omaha is very exciting. Knowing that we're one of the last eight teams and we have a chance to play for a national championship this week is very exciting.

Q. This is for all three players. I know it's an up-and-down season. You get in the postseason. What, if any, moment was the one where you're like, We're going to catch fire, and you caught fire as a team?

JAC CAGLIANONE: Once we got the opportunity to play in the postseason, I mean, record is reset. None of it matters.

We knew that we have loads of talent from top to bottom on this roster. Like I said earlier, just playing for each other, knowing what this program is about and what this program has always been about. Our final goal is to be here.

Having everybody buy into that and realizing we had that opportunity was really a good push in the right direction for us, and we just kind of built on it.

COLBY SHELTON: I would say the same thing. Just the opportunity that we had to get in the NCAA tournament and show everyone what we're really about. I think we've proven everyone why we should be in the tournament, and that's why we're here in Omaha.

Q. Jac, how does it feel just from August until now, the first game against St. John's, what do you feel about the confidence that you guys have going into Omaha? And obviously not the result you want from last year, but just getting it pitch by pitch and utilizing what you can do to help your team win?

JAC CAGLIANONE: I'm kind of confused what the question was.

Q. What did you just think about from the season of hitting the ground running in August and then playing the first game against St. John's and getting to this point of the season? How do you feel about the result that you guys fell short last year that you guys want to come out on top this year?

JAC CAGLIANONE: Yeah, I mean, coming one game away from it is probably a way worse feeling than not making the tournament at all, to be honest with you. Having the experience of being here and having guys who have been here has been really instrumental in knowing what it looks like and kind of what it takes to be here.

All the ups and downs and the highs and lows of the season, at the end of the day, we're here. So there's not really much else to worry about from the past. You just have to keep looking forward.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, good luck this weekend.

Questions for Coach.

Q. I guess I saw the rotation (inaudible). Curious about how you feel about that and how you feel about Liam as a freshman on the big stage and how he'll respond particularly from last week?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Well, I think you've been around me long enough, I don't like to make major changes this time of year. We've gotten to this point because we've done it a certain way. Liam has pitched really well against some really good teams down the stretch. I know he wasn't pleased with his last start at Clemson, but I firmly believe he will learn from that experience and give us a chance on Saturday.

Q. Last year you talked a little bit about appreciating it and realizing how hard it is to get here. Just the course, the road that this team has taken, do you find yourself feeling that again, grateful to be in Omaha, obviously with more work to do?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Most certainly. Every team is different, and obviously our road this year is different than in years past, but I always felt like if we could stay above .500 and get in the tournament that we would have as good a chance as anybody.

Going to Georgia was a difficult task, to win two out of three there. We played a midweek game against South

Florida towards the end of the year to get that win. And then to have to go to Stillwater and play Oklahoma State and Nebraska, both very good teams, and Clemson who was outstanding.

To get to this point, yeah, it's extremely rewarding. Extremely rewarding.

Q. The last couple of weeks to coach Jac, what do you appreciate most about him as a player and as a person?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I just -- it's easy to sit back and be in awe of his offensive numbers and the walks-to-strikeout ratio and how he has advanced on the mound. But the thing I keep saying over and over is how he's been able to submerge himself into the team and not his own personal success, which has really allowed him to have the season he's had.

Tremendous leader. He's one of the most likable guys in the locker room. He's just -- he's stayed the course. Obviously we wouldn't be here without him.

Q. We all have seen what Ashton can do the last couple of weeks, but before he got this opportunity, what was your kind of take of him? What did you know you were going to get if you did get the opportunity to have him as a player?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I don't know. I mean, he earned the opportunity. The thing about Ashton, he stayed engaged. Always gave a great effort in practice. Terrific teammate. He got his opportunity. Unfortunately, Ty broke his wrist, and he got the opportunity, and certainly he made the most of it.

Q. How happy were you for Michael Robertson to come through with that hit, kind of the season he's had, and also the value of having him back here playing the big outfield in Omaha?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: No question, the catch he made last year was one I'll never forget obviously. Michael or anybody else to have that opportunity and to rise to the occasion and have that opportunity to win a game at the plate is awesome.

I was just ecstatic for him to have that opportunity, and obviously he had a great at-bat and left on left and stayed on it. Yeah, I was just really pleased for him obviously.

Q. Other than the obvious physical gifts, what makes Caglianone a special player?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I'll start with the physical gifts he has. He's the biggest, strongest guy on the field, but the thing that -- we always used to talk about his pitching and hitting, but he's incredibly talented at first base defensively. I can't remember last time he's made a mistake on the base pass. He's a complete baseball player. Those are the things that sometimes can get overlooked because of his size and his power and his pitching ability, but he's a complete player.

One day he'll be a Gold Glover at first base. He's that good. He can run better than what people think. He's a really good runner.

Obviously he's got a great career ahead of him, but those are the other things that people have a tendency to maybe overlook. But, I mean, he's a complete player.

Q. As a follow-up to that, what have you seen from him this year in his ability to maybe set aside some of the pressure? He knows there's a lot of eyes on him. How have you seen him handle that?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Obviously it starts with his mom and dad. Then he has terrific teammates around him that support him, and it's a good question.

I think probably learned a lot from some of our players from last year. Wyatt Langford, for example, how he handled this whole process and that type of thing. He just has (indiscernible) around him, and he's handled it great.

Q. You guys faced Texas A&M back in March, but it's pretty much two different baseball teams now. Can you take anything away from that series or the familiarity with them being in the league?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: No. That series is so long ago. It has no bearing on Saturday night. It does make it a little bit easier because we have played them three times. I'm sure Schloss will say the same thing. You know, they played us three times.

From a scouting report deal, it does save you a little bit of time, but I'm sure they would say the same thing. But the series we played in Gainesville has no bearing on Saturday night.

Q. You mentioned Ty Evans, who obviously had an incredible run at this tournament a year ago. How hard has it been on him not to be able to play on this stage again, and how has he kind of helped guys, maybe like Ashton or Colby, who haven't played on this stage before?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I haven't asked him, but I know Ty well enough to know that, yeah, this is painful. He had an unbelievable tournament last year, and knowing the competitor that he is, it's got to be killing him inside that he's not able to play. His teammates have been great. He's been great in the dugout.

I know there's probably been times where he probably leaves the yard, and it's tough. It's tough. No one wants to play more than he does.

I really appreciate the teammate he has been and how he has handled it, but if you ask him, I'm sure it's extremely painful.

Q. How do you kind of go about managing nerves for Liam, who is going to open things up for you here in Omaha? Are there any steps you take? Will you have conversations with him? What's the plan for Liam?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, kind of make light of it a little bit. The alternative, he is sitting next to me in the dugout or he's out on the mound.

I trust him. I mean, we really don't know how anybody is going to react on a stage like this, but he has pitched in the SEC against some really, really good teams and has had success.

We don't have very many options as far as who to pitch on Saturday night. We probably have two choices, either Cags or Liam. Hopefully he'll handle the stage well. I believe he will. If I didn't think he would, he wouldn't start.

I'll spend some time with him one-on-one. I've been out here enough to have some ideas on what might help him. It's really about simplifying things and just keep doing what you are doing and just throw the ball across the plate and hopefully he'll learn. I truly believe in him. He's earned the right to open this thing up for us, and we'll see how it goes.

Q. Four teams from the ACC. What do you feel about the competition let alone from both conferences in college baseball, and what you guys can do to just course this time frame that -- playing a tough team like Kentucky a month and a half ago and Tennessee as well, how do you just feel about what's at stake to utilize the scouting alignments for those teams right now?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Well, as far as the scouting reports, I learned a long time ago that there's obviously two divisions. Two groups. All the focus is our group and worrying about the scouting reports on this side.

I think earlier in my career I might have spent equal amount of time on seven different scouting reports, but you're only -- if you get to the finals, you're only going to play one of those teams, so you have a couple of days to prepare for that.

Our whole focus has been on our side of the bracket.

Q. When you look up and down Texas AM's lineup, even without Montgomery, it seems like they have a lot of dangerous hitters. Anything else that stands out to you about how Texas A&M is playing now?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. I mean, they've got an outstanding lineup, and it's split right left, right left all the way down. They have a switch hitter. In my opinion -- I said this when we played him. He is one of those unsung heroes. It's easy to -- they have a third baseman, LaViolette, and Montgomery, and a bunch of those guys. But Appel for me, he was one of the most difficult outs in their lineup.

And they're older. They pitch really good. They have plenty of left-handed arms that really spin the ball, and they get to the back foot of the right-handed hitters.

Cortez now is one of the hottest pitchers in the country. They have a closer they really like that is extremely dependable. I mean, yeah, they're well-rounded.

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