

2024 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 15, 2024
Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Kentucky Wildcats
Coach Nick Mingione
Ryan Nicholson
Mitchell Daly
Trey Pooser

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky - 5, North Carolina State - 4

NICK MINGIONE: Just when you guys thought it couldn't get better. To God be the glory. What a game. What a game. Both teams, give NC State a lot of credit. That's an amazing team.

Just two teams just duking it out and taking advantage of opportunities. And just so thankful for our players, our fans. Our fans were amazing.

In that ninth inning, when Ryan hit that home run I could barely hear myself even think. It was awesome. Just proud of our team, their fight, their competitiveness, their desire to win.

Q. Trey, so much has been made about this being Kentucky's first-ever program appearance. How were the nerves? How did you handle the distractions? And what are you going to be able to do moving forward with that?

TREY POOSER: I was pretty nervous last night before I went to bed. When I woke up I was just not focused on anything but going out and executing today's game.

Obviously with our fans, they traveled all the way here. It was awesome. They helped calm my nerves, made it feel like it was a home game. It was awesome.

RYAN NICHOLSON: I think it was a little nery. I felt maybe I was a little more nervous for the first Super Regional game than this. But I just tried to feel like -- I've played a lot of college baseball. There's a lot of college

games. There just happen to be a lot of people there today. I just try to look at it like that, really.

MITCHELL DALY: Just the natural stuff. But once I saw Poos on the attack and him just going at people and going at hitters it really just brought the vibe of the whole. We calmed down and everybody got to work.

Q. Mitchell, walk me through what you saw on that pitch?

MITCHELL DALY: I was just trying to back the ball up. I was just trying to see the slider up. And Cousey said he leaves it up sometimes. I saw it up, and I just went for it.

Q. Obviously this is an amazing win, an amazing way to do it, but the historical significance that this is the first-ever win at the College World Series from Kentucky. Just how much more special is that?

RYAN NICHOLSON: I think it feels good to be the ground floor of what we're trying to produce for this program.

This will be -- this game is a really good starting point and a big confidence builder going forward. We didn't just come here just to be happy that we were here. We came here to win games. And that's what we were trying to do today.

Q. Trey, you opened the game with four straight balls and really kind of dialed it in after that. What did you to reassess?

TREY POOSER: Just go one pitch at a time. Obviously start off with a walk, you don't want that. You've got to shake your head, go to the next pitch and smile. We're not worried about what happened in the past; just focus on the present and do what we can to win.

Q. Mitch and Ryan, what's it like to see a guy like Nolan McCarthy blossom through the offense in the bottom of the fourth and sequence of certain other innings, too? How do you just feel about you guys being the 1-2 punch in the late innings and prevailing for the first win and the first game for you guys here in



Omaha?

RYAN NICHOLSON: I think it just happened to be us today. Our lineup, man, it's so deep. You get so much production from everyone up and down the lineup. Waldy probably would tell you that he didn't have his best day; just wait until he gets hot.

It just happened to be just the string of guys today and it could be somebody different tomorrow. Like, I or Chell could not have it the next day but somebody else will pick up the slack.

That's what this lineup and ballclub do really well. And everyone has the utmost confidence in the guy behind him and the guy in front of him. And I think that bodes well for us.

MITCHELL DALY: Off that, just playing for each other, picking each other up, 1 through 9, a bunch of competitors. And Nolan, I think his toes were over the white line. He just wants to get on. He's a winner, and we follow his lead a lot of the time.

Q. Three games here in Omaha, three walk-offs. It's pretty special, could you describe how special this sport is, the energy and here in Omaha how special the moment is?

MITCHELL DALY: I mean, Kentucky, I mean BBN, just the energy they brought today. I mean, I think everybody in the stadium was doing Waldy's walk-up song thing. It's really cool. The energy around this place is special. To give the fans endings like that, it's pretty awesome.

Q. You guys go down in the ninth. What was the message once you guys got back in the dugout?

MITCHELL DALY: Ammo brought us together and he said, this is what we play for. Let's have some fun. Let's do this. Don't try to do -- the whole message through the entire day, from Coach Ming and the rest of the coaching staff was don't try to do more. Just keep being us.

And like Ryan said, we have so much confidence in each other. And when he hit that home run, nobody was surprised.

Q. Just this team overall, I don't think any surprises with this team at this point. But as a coach who has been to Omaha before as an assistant, when you see the preparation for this team, did it surprise you at all how dialed in they were in from the start? We've seen teams before that have never been here that did not look that dialed in?

NICK MINGIONE: Thank you for the compliment. Means a lot coming from you. You watch as much college baseball as anybody. Thank you.

I was not surprised simply because this team has so many strengths, but the one thing -- not the one thing, but one of their many qualities is their ability to focus on the task at hand and move on immediately.

It is an absolute joy and pleasure to coach these guys because -- you know this, but we started out 14-1 in the league. That is like next to impossible. It's next to impossible.

And I remember telling them the story early in the year about, I love to try to educate them on baseball history at times. And we were maybe not pitching as well as we'd liked. I told them the story about Orel Hershiser. And I asked the guys, does anyone know who that is. They shake their head.

I said, what's he known for. And Ryan Hagenow, he raised his hand and says he had the consecutive scoreless innings streak. I said that's right. Then we educated them on how much at this moment how much.

And at the time it was 59 consecutive scoreless innings. They asked him, how did you do that? How did you do that? And he said, I didn't worry about the results. I focused on the execution.

So he wasn't -- when you have a team and you have a season like we've had -- and the reason why we were able to go 14-1 in the league is because as soon as that win was over at midnight it expired, as soon as they throw a pitch it's over, as soon as you take a pitch in an at-bat it's over. You have to move on as soon as possible.

This goes the same for life. Right? If you are struggling -- I had a sports psychologist tell me, if you struggle with depression it's because you live in the past. There's times where you keep reliving moments, and if you struggle with anxiety maybe you're living in the future too much.

In an age where everything in social media and everything is in front of their face -- and we have gotten them to a spot where they can just move on. So what? Like, so what? What now? Do something else.

So this team, they have this unbelievable ability to just move on to the next thing, regardless, good or bad. And when you're able to do that and you can move on quicker, you're able to do things like today.

And as far as the nerves and everything else goes, wow, this is a really long answer to one question. I mean, what are we doing here? I'll try to land this airplane. We've been circling for a while.

One of the things this team does well is they support each other and they just move on. They just move on. And it's crucial to our success.

Q. I saw you take a quick moment to yourself in the dugout after the team ran out to go celebrate. What was that moment like for you to just have a little bit more reflection on another emotional win?

NICK MINGIONE: Just so thankful. Just proud of our team, our current players, our staff, former staff, former players, for our fans. I've just tried to do the best job I could with this season just making sure that I show gratitude.

And there's so many people that I love and trust and just keep telling me, hey, keep soaking it in, keep taking it all in, keep taking it all in. And I'm doing it. I've done it all year.

I get to be around an amazing group of 18- to 24-year-olds and staff members, and I just want to keep taking it in.

Q. I know your heart must have dropped at least a little bit when Neville (phonetic) got thrown out. And when you get that victory it's, like, whatever. But what was the range of your heart in that moment, those couple minutes, because I know everyone in the ballpark was, like, oh, my God, why did he send that guy to second base. Then for it to not matter what was that moment like?

NICK MINGIONE: Let me tell you what we did. We put a hit and run on. Tough day to score, wind blowing in, and we're at our best when we attack. And we put a hit and run on.

And that was my call. And we put it on just trying to create something and make something happen -- try to suck an infielder, create a hole, get a first-and-third. We've got one out. We can bunt, we can hit, sac fly. We've got all these things.

But I told Ammo this after the game: When we are aggressive and we attack, there's times when you're going to get out.

And easy coaching, easy coaching is just sitting back and doing nothing. That's easy. Hard coaching is trying to create and put your players in the position to be successful.

And Mitch loves hit and runs. You can ask him. He loves the hit and run. And the guy through a great slider. The catcher made a great play, and he was out by maybe two, three feet. But it took a great play. The ball trickles off, it gets away, we're standing on third base. The threat of what we did -- how did our runner get to third in the first? Does anyone remember?

He's on second, the threat of the stolen base. Do we not throw the ball away? He gets to third base, and then we score. I mean, that's what we do. We create pressure and we attack.

And I'll tell you somebody who is good with it is my boss, Mitch Barnhart. He's totally fine with us being aggressive and attacking. He loves it. So that's what we do, we are aggressive and we attack.

Q. Johnny comes in there in the ninth and has the wild pitch. It gets away and they take the lead. But then he comes back out in the tenth and just one, two, three. Just some words on that guy and the way to bounce back.

NICK MINGIONE: It was crucial. The guy, his slider and curveball are hard to hit. They're also hard to catch. So but again our ability to just move on. We kept it there.

What if they get another run there? But we don't. We slam the door. We move it on. Quick inning.

And our dugout was awesome. They were, like, we're winning this game. They were wanting to win. We've been in so many close games. This is the beauty of our league, when you go back and look at how many games, one and two runs. We've just been in it and we're battle tested.

I will say this, this win was very much how we win baseball games. We have to pitch and defend at a high level. Pooser was phenomenal. He was absolutely great. I thought Dan Roszel called a great game. I thought Cam O'Brien came in and made a good play on a bunt. He did his deal as a fireman. Guys, this is awesome.

I made a plea last time I was up here for the people of Omaha if they were looking for a team. We get an email from the local fire department and said, hey, I heard one of your players is called a fireman. We've made you a fireman helmet and we brought it and had it in our dugout.

It was from the local fire department. Man, they listened. This is awesome. The people actually listened. And I thought he was great.

Jackson Nove got us a couple, got us a big out against a good hitter. We went left on left there. And then Johnny was phenomenal.

But think about our defensive plays today. Ryan Nicholson made two plays where we need every bit -- this game, you know this, the margin of victory is so small. What about the high chopper down first base that Nicholson jumps up and keeps fair? What about the pick that Nicholson jumps up and catches? We need every bit of his 6'4". What about that first-and-second and nobody out and the double play we turned. That's us at our best.

Mitch Daly made an awesome play on a bunt coming in if you guys remember that. Pete made a great play attacking a big hop ground ball. Devin made a great play on a popup. We two guys running into each other trying to catch a pop up. I told them, I'm fine. They're both calling. You can't hear.

But we're not going to sit there and let the ball drop and look at each other. No, we're like, boom, we're running into each other we want an out so bad. So that was us at our best.

And I thought Pete's at-bat in the first inning, I think it was 14 -- does anybody -- 12-pitch at-bat. He six two-strike foul balls in one at-bat. That sent a message.

We bunted, we stole bases, we hit homers. And you've heard me say it over and over, we are whatever-it-takes type of offense and I thought today showed that. Bunts, homers, two-strike hitting, walks, you name it. And when the park plays like this, you've got to be able to do all that. I was proud of them for that effort.

Q. Two-part question on the Nicholson home run. ESPN flashed a graphic that Ryan was batting under .200 in pitches in the lower, outside quadrant. To hit that home run on that pitch, in that spot. And also first time you guys were trailing all tournament and to get it back in one swing, could you touch on that?

NICK MINGIONE: What a response. What a response. I mean, when I tell you guys in the ninth, this team has true belief. They really thought we were going to win the game.

And do me a favor, don't tell Ryan that, about his stats. That's awesome.

But couple of things -- I've made this comment multiple times -- but when our offense really got going is when, back in March, we got Waldy in there full time, and when Ryan started hitting the ball over the fence. I think he hit maybe one home run preseason. And then Georgia, when

you look at the amount of home runs he hit in our league, I think he has the third most amount of home runs out of everybody in the SEC in SEC games.

Not a lot of people are talking about him but there's a lot of really good offensive players, a lot of good home runs hitters. And he's certainly one of them.

Q. What does it say about Trey that NC State had so much traffic on the bases early and he was able to limit the damage against a lineup that's really kind of overcame a lot of teams?

NICK MINGIONE: I thought he did a great job in the third. I thought he minimized. They had a chance to score multiple runs and he minimized in the third. And in the fourth he had 17-pitch inning, got (indiscernible) three outs. And in fifth, here we go again, first and second no outs.

We have a saying in our program, when you get a guy at first base or first and second just smile and get a ground ball. He did that. And we turned it for him.

I thought maybe his best inning was the sixth. He went one, two, three, had a 10-pitch inning.

So the guy has done that all year. That's what the great pitchers do, they're able to minimize. It's really hard. I thought their starter did a great job. I want to give NC State a lot of credit. He was awesome.

But the best pitchers, that's what they do, they minimize and make it hard for you to get them. I would say both starters on both sides did a great job of that today.

Q. Since we've come to Omaha we've heard a lot of talk about your style of play. But you tie the game with a home run in the ninth, you win it with a homer in the 10th. In terms of style, how proud are you of the way this team, you just touched on it, can win in so many ways?

NICK MINGIONE: And you know this, but that's why I started just calling our offense a whatever-it-takes type offense because our guys are so talented. When you go up and down the lineup, I mean, Waldy absolutely smashed balls today. He didn't get any hits, but he had 3-for-5 quality at-bats. And Emilien Petri was 5-for-5 quality at-bats. Every at-bat that guy had today was a good one.

So we just, when we get production up and down our lineup, that's us at our best, and we can do it in all different ways. And you know what? There's a lot of coaching that goes into that. But for the players to be able to execute all

those different things, we have to be very intentional.

And this was awesome. Scott Geisinger, he works for our athletic department, what a guy. We have so many amazing people in our athletic department. And he got a chance to watch us practice yesterday and he was like, this is awesome. He's like, this is awesome. He's, like, I understand why now, I get it. This is the first time I've seen you practice. The attention to detail by the players, their focus, their execution.

It's definitely not easy, but boy can they execute at a high level. And I just want to make sure that everybody knows it's not all about bunting. The whatever-it-takes type of offense, please, because bunting is a small piece to it, but to your point, we can hit homers too.

Q. What is it going to mean to you tomorrow to share Father's Day with Reeves on this stage? And to Reeves too to share this experience with your dad and get to be here in Omaha.

NICK MINGIONE: I was trying to get through a press conference without crying, okay? (Laughter).

Him and Christen, Christen's my rock. You know that? She's my rock. Coaches' wives, they don't get enough credit. My wife is amazing. She's amazing.

But we get to be his earthly parents. And this guy right here, man. He loves these players. He loves the players. He prays for them. I mean, he's in it with them.

And he and I had a cool moment before the game. We were sitting -- I was like, Reeves, do you remember early in the year we weren't ranked. And then we would win a couple games and he immediately wants to know, dad, do you think we'll be ranked. I'm like no, I don't think so yet Reeves. We've got some work to do.

Then a couple more wins later, you think we'll be ranked. I go no. And do you remember, what was the first ranking we thought we were going to get? What was it, like, 26?

REEVES MINGIONE: You thought it would be 27 through 30, and we ended up being 25.

NICK MINGIONE: I was like, Reeves, they got us! We get a couple more wins, he's like, do you think we'll be ranked? And I was, like, yes, Reeves. Then how did it go, do you even remember?

REEVES MINGIONE: I think it went 25, 23, 18, 16, and then went back to 21, then maybe 16, 10. Then we went to eight, six, then I think 16 or 18, then the highest we got

was around two.

NICK MINGIONE: Is this guy locked in or what? So this is where you want to be with your son. This is where you want to be. If you're a baseball coach, you want to spend Father's Day there. Yeah, I'm proud of him for so many reasons. But to be able to get to spend it not only with him but with Christen, it would be awesome and looking forward to it, for sure.

REEVES MINGIONE: I'm honestly kind of glad that we have the day off tomorrow. (Laughter).

I just can't wait to just watch baseball with him and just hang around with him all day long.

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