

2024 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 15, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

NC State Wolfpack

Coach Elliott Avent

Alec Marakewicz

Sam Highfill

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky - 5, North Carolina State - 4

ELLIOTT AVENT: I think both teams played well today and obviously got that big run in the ninth and thought with the way Dudan had been throwing we were in good shape, especially on a day where the ball wasn't carrying very well.

Tough day to hit here for power, which has been one of our trademarks. But he got one out to left, and then he got that last one.

Anyway, good ball game. Just means two things, one more game we've got to win, and we've got to win on Monday.

Q. Alec, you've been a pretty big leader since you transferred over. What's your message to the rest of the guys moving forward as you guys try to rebound?

ALEC MAKAREWICZ: I trust all of our guys. Like Coach said, it just means one more game. I wouldn't change the mindset. We played a good game. They're a really good team. Comes down to every pitch, every pitch matters. That's what I would say.

Q. Sam, similar question to you. You're one of the few guys on this team that's been to Omaha before. How do you guys kind of, as a leader yourself, kind of lead this team to rebound after a result like this?

SAM HIGHFILL: I think a day off and practice tomorrow will help kind of clear the minds and refocus. And we've got to be ready for Monday. And like Coach said, it's another game we've got to win.

Q. You won five of six games to get here. That's pretty much what you'd have to do to win a national championship. Could you take solace from that and pull from what you've done in the postseason so far to potentially guide you the rest of the way?

SAM HIGHFILL: Sure. I mean, we all know we are capable and we deserve to be here. And it's two good teams going at it. And sometimes you're going to come out on top of those and sometimes you're not.

Yeah, I mean, that plays a little bit of a part.

ALEC MAKAREWICZ: I mean, obviously it was a windy day. Like Coach said, we rely on the power here sometimes. It's a back-and-forth game. Hopefully we'll come out on top next time.

Q. Sam, how do you feel about your chemistry with Cozart this year and how you felt just after you gave up that two-run home run to Nolan, what was the sequence of the chemistry between you and Cozart after seven full?

SAM HIGHFILL: He's so good back there, and we talk after every inning. I knew after the first few innings that I didn't have as great command as I would like to have. So I kind of told him, like, let's not try to be so fine on the edges. He worked with me. I was able to start throwing more strikes and that was able to carry me through seven.

Q. Sam, when you had your last strikeout, you were real geeked up. I don't recall seeing any type of emotion like that from you. Do you think, relative to where you were three years ago when you were here, do you think you're almost back at that level now?

SAM HIGHFILL: Yeah, I mean, I knew I had it in me. I've known that I've had it throughout. It's just a matter of going out there and pitching. And, yeah, it was just a big moment, a big spot in a big game; and, yeah, I don't know if I've ever seen that emotion out of me either but...

Q. What was your message to the guys after that, and you guys have shown a lot of grit a lot throughout this



year especially through the second half of the year -- what gives you confidence that the response will be what you want to see?

ELLIOTT AVENT: I just told them, I said, playing in front of -- what does this place hold? -- playing in front of 25,000 people, I didn't see any nerves. I didn't see any jitters. It was the first time you've played in front of that many people on this kind of stage and I didn't see anything. But in case there were, they should relax here because you played -- we played very well.

And we played under control, had good at-bats, but everything has to be really, really good. You don't have any margin for error when you get to this final four format.

I just said it means we've got to win one more game, win on Monday and go home and shower, go out to dinner with your family, catch some of the late game, and we'll practice tomorrow and go at it again on Monday.

Q. You mentioned it a little bit, but could you go over the decision not to go with Derrick Smith; he's been in there for you all year.

ELLIOTT AVENT: So has Dudan. That's what we've gone all year; Dudan first and Derrick Smith second.

Q. You've mentioned on Thursday that one of your roles was just to kind of get out of the way at this stage of the season. But in a game in which you see momentum kind of shift so much back and forth, what was your mindset with the guys in the dugout between innings there?

ELLIOTT AVENT: Nothing. Just what we've done the last 10, 12 weeks, just play the game, focus on good at-bats, understand what guys are trying to do to you as you've had two or three at-bats and knowing what you're looking for in certain counts and the same thing we talk about every day. It doesn't change.

Q. Alec obviously injected some life. Was it kind of a weird game in terms of which balls were going out and which balls weren't; seemed like it was carrying to certain areas. What was your perspective on it?

ELLIOTT AVENT: I remember being here in '13 and I think it might have been the third year of the new stadium, people were talking about what a change it is. We practiced here two days ago and the ball was flying out of here.

But I don't remember ever seeing this much wind here right in your face. Kind of reminded me of Las Cruces a little bit,

a windy day and balls would start at third base and wind up in the upper deck almost.

Cozart hit a ball down the line that I swear early in the game, I swear it was going to hit in the corner for a double. It probably missed from me to you and maybe hit the foul pole. It was a weird thing. Then the home run in the ninth was that same kind of ball.

The only ball that was different was the one that the two-hole hitter, that he hit in the first inning, after, like, a 12-pitch at-bat and we threw a lot of fastballs, that got through the wind. But other than that, you're right, it was really different how different balls were responding all day today, but that wind was a factor.

Q. Is Noah Soles okay?

ELLIOTT AVENT: I don't know. He's seeing the doctor right now. He's gone through a lot of things here. He missed most of last year with a hamstring. He felt something in the hamstring again, and he could have played but we weren't going to push it and obviously didn't want to take him out, but for his safety and just precaution, we took him out. He's seeing the doctor right now.

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