

2024 Men's College World Series

Sunday, June 16, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Brian O'Connor

Anthony Stephan

Jay Woolfolk

Postgame Press Conference



Florida State - 7, Virginia - 3

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Certainly we're disappointed that we didn't win today and have an opportunity to advance on, but I'd first like to congratulate Florida State. They have a very, very good ballclub and well-coached. They deserved to win today.

The game came down to, they were very, very opportunistic. First and foremost, Dorsey was outstanding. I think he was the best that he's been in weeks and really commanded multiple pitches, was pitching in on our right-handers. He settled in and pitched a terrific ball game.

And then certainly, we all talk about it here, that to win in Omaha it's individual moments, individual players that rise up. And their left fielder certainly put two good swings on the ball, and they capitalized in the inning where they scored four runs. There were two outs, nobody on. And we didn't make a catch in right field. And they opened it up and were very, very opportunistic.

We had our chances to capitalize and didn't capitalize on it enough. I feel for Joe Savino. And when Jay got injured and Joe came in, we have a lot of confidence in him. And they had a great approach against him with two outs and capitalized on it.

So all of that said, certainly it doesn't take away from the season that we had. It always happens once you get to the postseason everybody ends their season with a loss other than the national champion. And that's the way it works.

And today it was us, and we'll deal with that and move on.

But it doesn't take away how proud I am of the young men that wear our uniform and how they fight and compete every day and represent themselves, their family and this baseball program. They represent it with class all the time. They play the game the right way.

And sometimes the game can be tough and cruel to you, like it was this weekend. But it doesn't take away from the season that Virginia baseball had and who we will be moving forward.

Q. Jay, what happened -- how did you reinjure yourself and how much did that affect you in the part of the game you continued?

JAY WOOLFOLK: Just freak accident, I guess. I felt fine, felt great. Feel great now. Just something that happened, and I really don't know how to explain it.

I'm sorry, it sucks that's the way to end your season. It's the last time I pitched. And Omaha, just, I couldn't tell you what really happened. Like I said, freak accident. I feel great now.

I wish I could have kept going. But Coach O was ready to do what's best for the team. Have the utmost confidence in Coach and I'll follow behind him no matter what the situation is and no matter what the decision is. And, quite frankly, people don't understand that.

He has done so much for me. And it just sucks to see people doubting that man and criticize some decisions he makes. But nobody has ever been in his shoes. People who criticize him have never been in his shoes.

Coach, thank you for everything. I wish things would have turned out different obviously here, but like I said, people don't understand -- people think it's easy to get to Omaha. People think it's easy to win in Omaha. And what some people put Coach O through and what we put Coach O through and how he handles us, it's hard.

And nobody else understands that but us. So whatever decisions he makes going forward, I just ask you all, please, be behind him because I promise you it's the right



one.

Q. Anthony, your first time in the lineup today, postseason. I guess offensively where has the approach kind of gone wrong, I guess, for you guys and what were you all seeing out there today?

ANTHONY STEPHAN: I mean, as Coach O said, he was beating us with fastballs today, which isn't very UVA-like as far as the season goes. We take pride in our approach and we work at it every day. And sometimes pitchers make good pitches.

But I just saw, like you said, command of three. Once you command three, it's pretty tough at this level. You've seen it. Some of these guys last year pitching in the College World Series, the next year they're in the Major Leagues.

These guys, doesn't matter who you play when you get to this level, it's tough. But I was proud of how we grinded through and made adjustments throughout the game and it just didn't work out for us today.

Q. Jay, the way you started the game, did you feel like you had your best stuff going? And did it get off when you started to feel the injury? Kind of where was that at?

JAY WOOLFOLK: I think I went, was it, six up, six down, in the first two innings. Felt great. Felt like I commanded every single pitch at will.

But, I guess, whatever happened happened, and I felt like I could have kept going. But I guess it had something to do with it.

Q. Jay, being a two-sport athlete, just a big presence for the Charlottesville community and also the alumni as well, coast to coast, globally, what would you like to say that you left your mark here with the Cavaliers' program? Obviously not going the way you guys wanted to go, but what would you like to say on what you left your mark on with wearing the orange?

JAY WOOLFOLK: Coach Bronco Mendenhall, Coach Tony Bennett, and now Coach O, these past few years, I want you all to know I gave you all everything that I had on the field, off the field, in the classroom. Without you all, I don't know where I am today without them. Obviously my family.

But Coach O, you know took a chance on a man who came to UVA (indiscernible) a hundred percent in baseball. I'm kind of glad I never had to do the hard (indiscernible).

But since Coach O is here, I could talk on about Coach Elliott and Coach Mendenhall. But just, Coach O, since you're here, know that I gave everything that I had. And thank you for making me the man I am today. I wouldn't be this far without you. The talks we had when the season was down, I wouldn't be here where I am, what you've done for me and my family --

BRIAN O'CONNOR: You earned it.

JAY WOOLFOLK: I just want to thank you, Coach.

BRIAN O'CONNOR: You're welcome.

Q. You actually ended up with 10 hits today to seven for Florida State's. But I guess eight of them were singles and the two doubles were spread apart. Do you need to have extra base hits if not home runs, doubles, triples here to win in Omaha?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Not necessarily. There's been quite a few, other than the Tennessee - Florida State game, there hasn't been a lot of runs scored.

So we just needed to be a little bit more opportunistic. Ten runners on base, a couple of base-running mistakes that you can't do at this level, that gets exposed.

And then they had a couple of guys step up to get big knocks to have the big inning in the fifth inning, the four runs.

And you need somebody to step up and hit a two- or three-run home run. And we just didn't get that or that big double to drive in two runs, whether it be the North Carolina game or this game, and we didn't get that.

It's not that the guys failed or anything like that. Like Tony said, it's high-level pitching. And, listen, everybody else is committed to their baseball program, too. You either do it or you don't. And we didn't do it at the right time, right? And the two teams we played did.

Q. You obviously have intimate knowledge how to make a deep run here. Do you have sense where that next 1 percent is for you guys to make another deep run going forward?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: That's a good question. We've certainly made a couple of deep run. And we haven't the last two years, this year and last year. That's frustrating, disappointing. Nobody likes to go two-and-out. There's going to be two teams in this tournament every year that do.

So it's just, last year we lost two one-run ball games. Had a one-run ball game this year. It's just being a little bit better, having some guys that when we've won in the past, we've had really, really elite pitching and always have played great defense.

So it's to get a little bit better on the mound, right, and finishing innings off on the mound, and just we've got to get some position players the next time we come here that really step up and have big days. And we just didn't have enough of it today.

I don't think it's anything with regards to the program or anything. We're proud of making our seventh trip, but I feel like we absolutely know what it takes to win in Omaha. You've just got to get the guys to do it. And when you come here enough, there's going to be times that you don't perform real well.

We're really, really close. We were really close last year and just have to be focused on being a little bit, as you said, that 1 percent, a little bit better. And we weren't that this weekend.

Q. You had two guys up here on the podium that were part of that junior class that have done a lot in this program. How have they prepared, I guess, the younger guys in this program to kind of take that mantel moving forward?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: You can see that smile on my face because that junior class we have, their first year we lost in a Regional to East Carolina and then to make back-to-back trips to Omaha is pretty special.

There's some really talented, impressive young men in that group. And they have imparted their wisdom of what our baseball program is about, and that's where it starts; it's about the standards that we have in our program.

Those guys impart that wisdom on those new players every year. So it's passed on. You see Eric Becker and Henry Ford and the guys that are in the sophomore class, they get it. They know it, they understand it, and that's because of the groundwork that that junior class has laid.

I don't know which ones of them will be back next year. We'll find that out in July. Every program goes through that. But they have left, certainly, their legacy in this program because of how they carried themselves on and off the field, and they understand the concept that words matter and what they say to each other is really, really important.

Q. How valuable was just this experience this year for

some of those guys who will be back, Godbout and Ford and Becker, guys like that?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Incredibly valuable. Certainly, yes, the experience here in Omaha, although it doesn't leave a good taste in our mouth, but more about what you have to navigate through the entire season to put yourself in the opportunity that they had.

Yes, we didn't win in Omaha. We're well aware of that. But it's more about what did they learn to navigate through the entire season; the ups and downs, the little moments, that's what it's about, that's what they'll remember.

When they get to be my age, you know, they won't dwell on that they didn't win here in Omaha. They'll dwell on how them and their teammates stepped up at different points in the season.

No better example than Jay Woolfolk. It pained me to take him out of the game, but you all saw him hobbling out there. And on this stage, as much as he wants to gut through it, when your velocity drops two or three miles an hour and you can see him not moving athletically on the mound like he does when he's fine, they'll remember the lessons that they had all year and playing in this program.

Listen, that's what I owe them. That's what I promised them in the recruiting process. I don't process them Omaha. They can look at it and see the success that's happened in this program, that there's a really high percentage chance that they're going to have the opportunity to play in this great event. Our tradition has shown that.

What I do promise them is that when they leave our baseball program, they will be men and they'll be able to stand on their own two feet and fight for what they want in life.

If they're fortunate enough to be in professional baseball, they'll be prepared. And that's reflected in the amount of former Cavaliers that have played and are playing right now in the Major Leagues. But at its core, what I owe them is for them to become a man, them to become a leader, that's what's important because they'll all become fathers or successful people in life, and that's the impact that we make on them.

That's why I got into it. I did not get into it to coach teams in Omaha. Coaching teams in Omaha is a byproduct of running your program the right way, and that's why I got into it and that's why I continue to do that. And the day that I can't continue to impact their life and the way that they approach things and become men, then I won't be a

baseball coach anymore. But at its core, it's what I love to do.

Q. I know he did not have the day at the plate that he wanted, but Griff was his usual self at shortstop today. I'm assuming he's heading on after this. What has he meant as a three-year starter at shortstop?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Program changer. Right? You might sit there and say, well, Coach you all have been to Omaha five times, won the national championship before that guy went into your program. You could still have program changers.

The guy is an incredible leader. He's an incredibly impressive young man. Plays the game even keel. Elite-level shortstop. He's the guy, when you're starting to stray a little bit, he brings them back in, and that's special.

We're going to miss him. Obviously his play on the field is elite, but what I'm going to miss most about Griff O'Ferrall is the man that he is because he has an impact on everybody in the clubhouse every day. And candidly, he impacted me because of how he goes about his business, and you get an opportunity in coaching to coach some really, really special young men, and Griff O'Ferrall is absolutely one of them. No question.

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