

2024 Men's College World Series

Monday, June 17, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

NC State Wolfpack

Coach Elliott Avent

Alec Makarewicz

Logan Whitaker

Sam Highfill

Postgame Press Conference



that I can go out there and pitch and let them hit the baseball and we can make plays behind me. Other than the change-up and fastball command, knowing they're behind me is what worked today.

Q. Logan, you talk about going into this that you were on the team in '21 but didn't get a good chance to pitch in this ballpark. What did it mean to show it on this stage?

LOGAN WHITAKER: It's everything. It's what you play for. I never got a chance to travel to the place, so this is the first time for me, too. And I'm happy I've been able to share it with a bunch of guys for their first time and the guys that came back. And it's been nothing short of spectacular.

Q. Alec, what has this one year meant to you? You get one more crack at college baseball. To choose to come here end your season at Omaha, how special was that?

ALEC MAKAREWICZ: It was more than what anybody, I think, expected. And these players and these coaches have let me be myself as a player and as a person. It just means the world to me. It's been a good ride.

Q. Alec, you kind of answered this, the other two gentlemen, leaving something better than you found it. What's that mean to you, Sam and Logan? You guys have been here a while and this is an elite level that NC State got to?

SAM HIGHFILL: I'm just grateful for the last five years. Your career could end anywhere. But for it to be here, it's special. I'm just grateful.

LOGAN WHITAKER: I've got nothing to say on that. I followed a lot of Sam's steps. That's all I've been trying to do all year. Watching him compete in Omaha was the one thing, when they got snubbed, it was one thing I wanted to come back and do for him.

I think what we leave behind is that no matter what you face, there's always a chance and all you want is a chance.

Florida - 5, North Carolina State - 4

ELLIOTT AVENT: I'm just so proud of these guys to my left who are representing 30 other guys in that locker room and the coaching staff, bullpen catchers and trainers and strength coaches who have worked very, very hard and took us on a ride of a lifetime because this place is so magical. It's so fun to get here and it's so hard to leave.

It's such a super place, everybody in the community, the Air Force base which was kind enough, General Cotton, to host us the other day. Gave our players and staff a day of total eye-opening enjoyment and life, what life's all about.

Just the people at our hotel couldn't have been more hospitable and welcoming. Like I said, it's a hard place to get to. It's a great place to get to. It's hard to leave.

Q. Logan, could you speak about what was working for you today? And to go seven innings in this ballpark, to do what you did today with that difficult Gator lineup?

LOGAN WHITAKER: The change-up was working today and it worked earlier when I didn't have my fastball command in the first couple of innings. But without that defense behind me there's no way I do what I do up there.

So big credit to Soles in right making that diving catch. That was huge. And Butters doing what he does and all the other guys do what they do. That's what makes me successful.

With the wind blowing in, I have confidence in all my guys



And I'm hoping that we leave something on the lines of never give up and you hear it a thousand times with Jim Valvano. We keep leaving that legacy behind.

Q. Sam, what does it mean to you hear a guy like Logan, a six-year veteran, talk about wanting to follow in your footsteps and getting all the guys that came back to get this program back to Omaha?

SAM HIGHFILL: It means the world. And what he did today was remarkable and not surprising at all.

Guys like A-Mak and Pennington, who choose to come here and spend their last year of college here have been the backbone of our lineup all year.

The young guys that stepped up in the bullpen all year long, we wouldn't be here without all those guys. Just, again, thankful for all the great teammates and coaches that I've had.

Q. Each of the three young men you brought in here has a unique story and now becomes collectively NC State's story. Could you speak to that how meaningful it is for you to be part of that story?

ELLIOTT AVENT: I could talk about each one of them, Sam Highfill and Logan Whitaker, forever. Logan Whitaker went through so many things, went through so many things to get here. At one point, I think everybody maybe medically had almost told him it wasn't going to happen. There's no way he could go through the things he went through surgically and taking a step backwards every time.

But I've said this probably at least 50 times this year, and it's a great lesson for anybody in life, no matter what your situation is. It doesn't have to apply to sports. But if a person doesn't quit on themselves then there's going to be somebody out there that's not going to quit on you. That's what Logan represents.

And Sam Highfill, I can't say enough about Sam Highfill. He epitomizes what this program stands for and is all about. He does everything in a classy way. And that whole locker room does. I told them we're going to go back tonight and we'll be with our families, with our girlfriends, some of the many great fans we have that made the trek out here. But you'll always be remembered for how you leave a place, not what you did.

I'm sure they'll do that again tonight. And just really proud of everybody that's a part of NC State baseball.

Q. I imagine the last couple of days you spent a lot of time looking at Caglianone video. At the college level

have you seen anyone with that level of raw power and is also a bad-ball hitter that gets to that power so often?

ELLIOTT AVENT: He's a free swinger, for sure. And we know Fritton can be very dominant. That's why we chose to go with him. If he has that electric fastball, which he did early -- I think maybe he was 16-of-20 strikes of the first six hitters. Then he kind of went 3-2 on 7 and 8 and walked those guys. And I knew then if he's going to -- if that's the route we're going to go, we've got a problem.

But the guy at the bottom of the lineup, he did a great job against TCU, got a couple of hits. Did a great job tonight. Got the base hit to left field. Good ball player, good hitter.

And he was able to pop No. 4 up, who is a great high-ball hitter. That one really scared me.

We thought we'd go up on Caglianone. Whittaker was coming in to face the next hitter. We thought we'd see if Caglianone would chase again. Unfortunately, Fred got the ball down, and that ball he hit to right center, that's as hard -- I mean, you're looking at a future Big Leaguer.

I've been here and seen Schwarber and Bryce Harper and all these guys growing up and playing baseball, whether you're recruiting or facing them in college. He's a big league hitter, I can tell you that.

Q. Twenty runners left on base through both the games and the tournament. Is that where things went awry?

ELLIOTT AVENT: At this ballpark, at this time of year, with all the great pitching you're going to see, you've got to take advantage of every opportunity.

And I thought in that first inning, when we had Cags, I thought they were going to take him out the first inning. But we got bases loaded. Butterworth got the hit to the left to get us one run and still bases loaded. And we got a call on a check swing, which, I don't know, I'll go back and look at it, but we didn't come out on the good end of the check swing.

And I think a couple more balls in the dirt. We had an opportunity there. That was a missed opportunity. But you talk about leaving runners on base. Good pitching staffs are going to do that, and obviously Florida has a good pitching staff.

It's not that easy but, yeah, missed opportunities in this game will drive you crazy.

Q. Being one of the four programs from the ACC to make it to Omaha, what's it like to see just the talent in the conference and come next year with the new programs that are going to be in the ACC?

ELLIOTT AVENT: Well, yeah, I've been in this league for a long time. I think I was in it when it was an eight-team conference -- I know it was a nine-team conference, I know that. To see it grow and see all those teams to come in, how they've gotten better, from Boston College to Pitt, to all these teams that come in, they just keep getting better and better.

I don't try to use exaggerated words like "best" and "most" and everything is in recent memory, but this league is as good as it's ever been top to bottom, and next year when you add a couple more teams to that, it just keeps getting better and better.

So I don't try to compare leagues. I've been in a few leagues, they're all good, and it's hard to win. Everybody tries to win and it's hard.

But obviously this is one of the top conferences in the country. I think this weekend is certainly, if there were any doubters of that, have shown that, and there's a lot of talented players in this league, certainly.

Q. We've talked to the players about leaving this program better than you found it. You look at this year's roster, a lot of seniors and grad students and a lot of freshmen. How does getting to this stage, getting back to Omaha set the table going forward to keep the torch going for NC baseball?

ELLIOTT AVENT: We've got a staff that recruit nonstop. They're just great recruiters. One of the guys at ESPN this morning gave Chris Hart a great compliment. I think Chris Burke called him a savant for talent.

And part of that is how hard he works, not just having a nose for it like a bird dog, part of it is just work ethic, he gets them right more than he gets them wrong.

But we have a lot of young pitchers coming back that Sam alluded to that got a lot of valuable innings on valuable stages this year that are going to make us feel pretty good coming back.

Obviously, when you think about replacing Logan Whitaker, Sam Highfill, Makarewicz, Pennington -- Noah Soles has been with this program so long -- Jacob Cozart will be in the draft.

And I don't know of anybody that outworks him or loves this

game more or works at his trade and takes care of his body, what he eats and how he lives his life than Jacob Cozart. We'll lose some guys to the draft, possibly Eli Serrano and Butterworth.

It's a good number of young arms coming back. You have to have pitching to be successful, but obviously we'll have to go home now, work very hard to fill a whole lot of holes to give us a chance in this conference next year.

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