

2024 Men's College World Series

Friday, June 21, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Jim Schlossnagle

Hayden Schott

Ryan Prager

Pregame Press Conference



JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: We're excited. Obviously been a great week. Excited for the 12th Man. Looking forward to the number of Aggies that are going to roll in town here. It's always special.

And super excited for our players. They've earned this opportunity. As you know, we've been through a lot throughout the course of the year, as all teams have that made it this far. Ready to play. Two off days is great but we're ready to get back on the field. Looking forward to get back to practice today.

Q. Ryan, how can you -- is there a way to measure what Max Weiner has meant for you this season? And what you think back about how you're a different pitcher because of him, what are some indicators for you?

RYAN PRAGER: I think just the impact he's had on everybody, it's night and day. To do it in one year and build trust with somebody, I think that's super important, is how quickly you can have somebody trust you and build that relationship. I feel he was able to do that from day one.

I think that's truly what's helped us make some steps forward is that there's a total buy-in from everybody down there in the bullpen.

What he's done, I think he's just instilled confidence in guys. Not that guys didn't have it before, but it's a new level of it. He's given you the evidence and helped guys get better, whether it's stuff. But really the mentality of it, he makes sure everybody is confident in themselves over confident in their stuff.

Q. Hayden, you're hurt or a little bit. Jace has been hurting a little. Braden went out. You guys are pretty banged up right now. How have you navigated all this given all the health issues you faced for quite some time now?

HAYDEN SCHOTT: I mean, if I would say one word, I'd just say perseverance. I think it's also a testament to our guys that maybe haven't played a lot throughout the season. It's just that next-man-up mentality.

When you've guys like Kaeden Kent and Jack Bell who prepare the same way every day as if they're playing, that's how you have depth and a team that when guys do go down you can have guys step up.

I think it's a testament to them. It's a testament to our team as a whole and our mentality. But it's just awesome to see as a teammate, to have that next-man-up mentality, for sure.

Q. Ryan, when you look back at being in Omaha a couple years ago, not playing last year, bouncing back, just kind of your journey, just have you had time to reflect at all? How does it feel to actually be here, one of the last two teams, with the championship so close?

RYAN PRAGER: I mean, I think being back this time I've been able to take it in a little more, I think enjoy it. And I think just the whole experience of it is a little bit better.

One, a little bit more comfortable with it and this group of guys and everything.

I think we've truly been able to take care of business and play baseball, but also enjoy it when we're off the field. And to be one of the last two here, it's super exciting. We're super grateful for it.

We've put ourselves in this position. And just really excited to basically play a three-game series and try to be the first one to win two games.

Q. Ryan, going off that question, with Coach Weiner, I



know there's a lot of talk about dominating the zone, that being a big focal point. Throwing strikes alone does not guarantee success, speaking from personal experience. How would you kind of describe what he's able to talk to you guys about to not just throw strikes and you'll get positive results, but still be able to be effective while dominating the zone?

RYAN PRAGER: Yeah, I mean, I think the first thing he obviously talks about is dominating the zone because we have to be in the zone first to give us a chance. But other than that, I mean, every bullpen we do, it's not like a bullpen's a developmental bullpen. Everything we do is developmental, whether it's creating pitch shapes or cleaning something up.

So I think it's because it's so simple and consistent throughout the year, we know what we want our pitches to do and what we want them to look like. And that's what we try to get them to every week. Once we get that, it goes straight to being in the zone and just competing.

Q. Hayden, have you ever played through an injury like the one you are right now? And just how difficult is it moving around, running the bases for you in these games?

HAYDEN SCHOTT: No, I haven't, but also I think it's been overhyped a little bit. I mean, I'm fine. I don't know, we have Jackson back there who is way more banged up, has a way harder job than I do. Jace is pushing through something.

At this point of year everyone's pretty banged up. It's just as a matter of much you want to leave on field. And there's no one in our dugout that doesn't want to leave everything on the field. That's the beauty of it. It's not just me, by any means.

Q. Hayden, can you just talk about what it is about the Texas A&M program that just drew you here to play here? And also just what it means to you to help be a part of this team that made the final.

HAYDEN SCHOTT: I mean, I come from -- I actually went to boarding school for high school. It's all based on tradition and excellence and stuff like that. When I met the coaching staff and learned more about A&M as a whole, the student body and the people surrounding Texas A&M, that group of people is so powerful and they're so supportive. And I think that initially drew me in. It's been nothing short of amazing during my tenure here.

And then obviously you have the best coaching staff in the country, which helped out a little bit. So I think the mix of

the people at A&M and this coaching staff, that was the initial draw. And then now having this group of guys that I've got to come play for a championship with is pretty unbelievable.

Q. Hayden, I know you tweeted about it last night, what does it mean -- how have you been able to balance watching your brother in the trials and your family and how that's all going?

HAYDEN SCHOTT: Yeah, good. I mean, watching him on NBC is pretty awesome. He's a stud. Super proud of him.

Q. Just how your family negotiated coming here, going there, all that.

HAYDEN SCHOTT: I don't know. They split it up a little bit. Dad was here, mom was there. You know what, I hope they can come this weekend. He didn't win last night so he'll have a chance to come this weekend. But hopefully he gets to come watch.

Q. I asked this question of the Tennessee guys, too. These are two of the programs, you're like, I can't believe they've never won the College World Series. There's so much history here. How much would it mean to each one of you to pay that off for the people that came before you in the program?

RYAN PRAGER: Yeah, I mean, one, I think it would mean a lot because everybody comes and joins this program because you want to win a championship. You want to be the best. You want to beat the best. You want to play against the best. That's why you come to a place like this.

And it would mean a ton, just the guys that played before us, you see the support that they still bring back. Guys that were on the '22 team, guys that were on the team even before that. They care. They really do care beyond their tenure as a player here.

I think just to be able to do it for them, give them a sense of accomplishment.

And also the fans that are here that support us all throughout the year. And excited to see what the 12th Man brings this weekend.

HAYDEN SCHOTT: Yeah, I mean, you said it best. To do it for -- I've only been here one year. I'm not going to act like I've been here for five years, but to do it for this university, with what I've been able to experience this year, would be life-changing. It makes me cry just thinking about it.

It would be so awesome. And obviously to do it for this group of guys and this coaching staff would mean the world.

Q. Ryan, wondering what you're taking from your start, what you're taking from your start against the SEC Tournament against Tennessee and that lineup going into tomorrow?

RYAN PRAGER: The start in the SEC Tournament was shorter. That was the plan going into it. I think there's some familiarity with them. There's a little bit of -- I don't know if it's a sense of comfort, but, like, been there, done that almost.

But also we'll have a great game plan written up by the coaches and by our team. I think it's cool because done it against them before. But also we have to go out and execute this time and just baseball will take care of baseball.

Q. You had a College World Series program at your previous stop. Is this why you came to A&M, to be in the championship game?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: No. I mean, we were one game away from the championship game in 2016 at TCU. We were one game away in 2010 if it wouldn't have been for Gerrit Cole and Trevor Bauer.

But I think at TCU we were in the final four a couple times. I didn't think of that going into A&M because I feel that TCU is a great program.

My choice was a personal choice in my own personal life. I'll say it again, as I said it at that time, I wasn't taking a better job; I was taking a different job. TCU's program was ahead of Texas A&M at the time, in my opinion. No disrespect to anybody else.

It was an opportunity. I had spent 18 years at TCU, eight years at Tulane as an assistant. So 26 of my however many years were at private schools. And I just wanted the opportunity, if it aligned perfectly, I wanted the opportunity to attack a large state school with the way we did things. And it happened to be at the right time. I think everything has a shelf life. I love TCU. I truly love it.

I bleed that school. Both of my children went to school there. There was no negative -- I wasn't running away from anything. I was more just running to something that I wanted to try differently.

Q. Jim, congratulations to you and Texas A&M for competing for the national championship. We know

the ballpark plays big. Everybody talks about the pitching and the hitting. I really like the way the Aggies play defense. Just your thoughts on how big defense is going to be to get that crown to Bryan and College Station?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: I think all phases of the game are important -- pitching, defense, timely hitting. If you get all three you'll win. If you get two of the three, you've got a great chance.

Outfield defense is incredibly important in this ballpark. We're banged up in the outfield. And you saw -- shoot, we had a chance to score 10 runs the other day if it wasn't for Michael Robertson, the center fielder. He ran down, made some really nice plays out there on Teddy Burton and a couple other guys. The entire thing is important.

I know Tennessee has played awesome defense. I think anybody who has made it to this point has done that.

We've caught the baseball and pitched well. That's really been the recipe with some timely hits, because -- I think we've hit one homer, by a freshman, in this tournament. And the home run most of the season has been a big part of our offense.

Awesome part of -- it's why you have a great season, you can win games different ways.

Q. Same question I had for the guys. You love the history of the sport. It's amazing A&M has never won this thing. What would it mean to finally get over this hump for this program?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: It would be awesome. I think the 12th Man deserves it so much. They've been so close and invested so much in athletics.

We all know the football stories. Coach Buzz has done an unbelievable job. Joni, our women's basketball coach, has incredible things moving forward. Trisha Ford in softball. We're doing great in women's golf. There's so much sports that are doing awesome at A&M.

It would be really cool. I think we're the first team to be in the national title in any sport since the '30s, maybe. Did I read that somewhere? So even just that accomplishment's great, too.

I just love -- the 12th Man is so special. If I start talking about it too much I'll start crying because they really are a unique, special group of people that are so supportive. And it would be awesome to reward that.



Q. When you saw Braden get hurt there against Oregon on that play at the plate, I guess did your heart sink on that? And when you consider all the injuries that this team has had to play through, I know you mentioned the next-man-up thing, but as far as just the degree of difficulty of getting to this point, given what you guys have gone through on the medical issues.

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Yeah, my heart sank. Everything sank in that moment, mainly just for Braden. I think it was '17 -- we lost Luken Baker at TCU a couple weeks before the end of the season. So we played without potentially our best player on that team at TCU.

It happened to us at Tulane in 2001. We lost our cleanup hitter at the end of the year and played to the College World Series on that team in Rosenblatt.

I've been through it before. So I wasn't as concerned for our team as I was just in the moment, heartbroken for Braden and Shane Sdao. And even Jace to have to play not at full speed and Schott. And Appel is banged up.

So you just hate it for them because barring getting hit by a bus, I'm probably going to have other seasons and these guys don't.

They have other seasons maybe in professional baseball, but they have a limited number of seasons in college baseball. So you just hate it for them.

Q. I know you're not surprised at all to see Tennessee here. You've talked about them being one of the top teams all year. But just for the college baseball fan, how exciting is it to have this match-up -- your lineup, their lineup, pitching staff? This match-up, Tennessee and Texas A&M?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: It would be awesome if we were at full strength, that would be really cool. But we're also playing well. And I think we're pitching well. And Tennessee is, in my opinion, we didn't play -- I watch a lot of college baseball. We didn't play Kentucky during the regular season but we played them here. And I thought they had a great team.

But Tennessee is far and away the best team I've seen outside of our team this year -- pitching, defense, so physical, so well-coached by Tony and Josh. Elander captain of one of our teams at TCU 2012 at UCLA. That's hard.

I root for Josh every game except for this game this weekend. Coach Anderson has done awesome. Incredible. Doesn't surprise me what Tony's done, and not

just with his team, but with his entire program as a whole.

Yeah, looking forward to playing against them. And that's what you get in our league, and that's obviously what you get in the world series.

Q. You've been a head coach for over 20 years, coaching long over 30 years now. What has been special about this group of guys and the staff around it this season as a whole and just the position you're in right now being two wins away from Texas A&M's first national championship in baseball?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: I've said it many times, easily the most synergized -- is that a word? -- to have really great culture among our coaches, including support staff, like so talented, energy, work ethic, loyalty, knowledge of the game. Like, this is the best coaching staff -- most complete coaching staff that I've been a part of, and had some great ones at different schools.

And then the players, I mean, pure talent, just pure draftable talent, it's the best team I've coached, when you look at it from a draft standpoint.

But I think I've been a part of other teams that have elite energy and elite culture and elite synergy that just haven't -- the ball's bounced a different way, or a guy -- in 2016, we were one win away from this, and we were playing awesome and Coastal Carolina had to win three games and we had to win one and they did.

In 2017, we were playing awesome but a dude named Faedo shut us out, I think by the same score. I was thinking about that when we were playing Florida. Thankfully Alex wasn't pitching.

I've been a part of a lot of great teams. A lot of great teams don't get to play for a national title because baseball is baseball, and anybody who has ever been around baseball understands that.

Q. The pitching that you've had in this series has been phenomenal so far. Shut them down. I wonder especially for Ryan, when he was here in '22, a little bit of a rough outing against Oklahoma. Had a really strong outing, obviously, no hitting -- no hitting, I think, through six innings. What did you see from him in terms of his confidence building from getting that outing?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: I think he needed that for himself. He's a completely different -- he's still the same guy, super intelligent. You've seen him, been around him. Hardworking. Such a student of the game and all that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

stuff, but physically -- back then, that was the tail end of his freshman year, he was out of gas.

Little did we know he was a couple weeks away from Tommy John surgery. He wasn't hurting at the time but I think he was headed in that direction, sounds like.

I'm glad that he had a chance to get back on the field. I recruited him hard at TCU. I remember where I was standing on my back porch in Fort Worth when he told me he was going to A&M. Little did we know what was coming.

But I'm excited for Ryan. Excited for his family. He's got a great family and great parents. And I hope he can replicate that against a really tough offense tomorrow.

Q. How do you manage the pitching, the rotation this week, and what's kind of your thought process on how you get the arms out there?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Good question. If I knew, I'd tell you. Without Sdao, we've had to get creative. We had to get creative in the first game with Lamkin. When Sorrell hit the home run to make it 5-0, that made the decision to get him out a little easier in the game against Florida. Because every pitch he threw, I was thinking that's one less pitch he might be as effective with in this upcoming weekend. So we'll see how he feels. We'll see how tomorrow goes. We'll do everything we can within reason to give ourselves the best chance to win tomorrow and then see what happens on Sunday afternoon.

So the pitchers, the other pitchers have been prepped over and over and over again that this is going to fall to more than just the three or four guys that have pitched to this point. So it's going to take a village to get through the next two or three days.

Q. I believe you said Ryan Prager is going to pitch tomorrow against Tennessee. Do you have a rotation for the rest of the week? And also what is Jace LaViolette's status after we saw him come out as a defensive replacement late on Wednesday?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: Prager will pitch tomorrow. I don't have an idea who will pitch the other games.

And Jace, he moved around pretty well yesterday. We didn't ask a lot of him. And we'll see how today goes. Probably won't ask him to move much today, just give him every opportunity to get healthy, or better, at least. But I can't imagine him not playing the field.

I mean, even at the level he was at the other night.

Hopefully he'll be better than that. And if he's not, then we'll have to make some adjustments either before or during the game.

Q. What does it mean for you and the rest of the coaching staff to give guys who came here their first year and are only going to have one year with you, Hayden, obviously Braden, Jackson, just to be able to kind of give them that opportunity to play for a national championship and not maybe like a bridge to something else but actually make the most of it?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: It means a lot. Because we had to convince those guys. We lost out on some other guys. Had a guy go to another school saying, hey, if I was in high school I would be coming to A&M but I want a chance to win next year, so I'm going to go to somewhere else in our conference.

And that was disappointing because I felt like even though we didn't -- we did play to a Regional final last year. We did play in the SEC Tournament championship game. It wasn't like they were coming to a JV program. But, yeah, you're trying to break that stigma and join the club of teams that are on TV at the very, very end.

So those guys chose to stick with us, and it's awesome to be able to reward their choice and just ecstatic to get to watch them play. As I told them yesterday, this thing is all going to be over Tuesday morning, one way or the other, either tomorrow or Tuesday it's going to be over.

Most teams don't know when their season is going to end. We're pretty sure when ours is going to end, one way or the other. That's a gift. That's a blessing we should be thankful for.

Q. You obviously hired Tony back in the day at TCU. What were the things that drew you to him then, and what's it been like seeing the trajectory he's gone on as a head coach since then?

JIM SCHLOSSNAGLE: At the time we were looking for a recruiting coordinator after -- let me think here -- that's when Coach Maze, I think, left to go -- no. I forget. So Mazey left after 2012. I was looking for a recruiting coordinator. Sorry. They're all running together.

Tony was with me, '11, '12, '13, that's what it was. Todd Whitting got the job at University of Houston after we went to Omaha in 2010 at TCU and then we hired Tony. He was with me '11, '12 and '13. He was well known as just the hardest working, laser-focused recruiting guy in the country.

He did an awesome job for us at TCU. Most of the players on that '14 -- we went on a run '14, '15, '16, '17 coming to Omaha, a lot of the core players on that '14 team was recruited by Tony.

He comes from a great family. Dad is the greatest dude ever. Great high school coach.

I remember used to always welcome Coach Vitello, the father, on our bus as we traveled through the course of the year it was great having him on the bus and having him around. I love great high school coaches.

Tony, you could see his energy, his passion. Obviously a super intense guy. And he came from a great family, and he was around -- I know he thinks a lot of Coach Jamieson at Missouri. He got to work for Dave Van Horn.

So he was fully prepared to go run his own program, and he's done a great job, obviously. And I think it's not -- when you go there watch, experience a three-game series there, it's not just the baseball stuff, it's everything else that he's done a good job with is what I think the best coaches do. It's the game environment. It's the promoting your program and everything that Ron Frazier and Skip Bertman got going back in the day, I think the best coaches do all of that. And Tony's done a great job of that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports