

2025 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

UCLA Bruins

Coach John Savage

Roch Cholowsky

Dean West

Press Conference



because you obviously haven't lost since?

ROCH CHOLOWSKY: Coach made a good point after the game, that we can use this game, this game and that weekend out in Omaha, in the Big Ten Tournament, is only going to be useful if we make it useful. So just understanding the park, getting a taste for what Omaha is and just being hungry to get back here was the main thing.

DEAN WEST: I thought Roch nailed it. There's always something you can take from each game, just depending on what you want to take out of it and just attack each day with that same intent.

Q. For both you guys, just to go off that, you guys have come so close in May. Now you're back here with a chance for something even bigger. Can you describe what that feeling is like?

DEAN WEST: Obviously it's a big deal to come back here to Omaha, but we know we need to approach each game like it's every other game and not come out of ourselves.

ROCH CHOLOWSKY: It's pretty surreal being back in Omaha. Only eight teams a year get to come here and compete for a national championship. The fact that we're still playing baseball in late June is very important to us.

That's just the main goal. That's what we chase all year. So being back here to win a national championship is really real.

Q. Same thing about you guys being back in Omaha and how you were here a couple weeks ago. Any advantage that you played in -- especially in that Nebraska game, sort of a road environment, you know the stadium and the dimensions and all that stuff?

JOHN SAVAGE: I think it is. I think we're the only team that's been here. This is the first time forever that the eight teams last year are not back. So that means there's a bunch of new faces. So the fact that we've played a week-long tournament here, I think is an advantage, just in terms of the hotel, practices. We played Illinois. We

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now are UCLA Bruins head coach John Savage and student-athletes Dean West and Roch Cholowsky.

JOHN SAVAGE: I think you can see by my nameplate, you can tell that they weren't expecting us. But I'm teasing.

We're excited to be here, clearly. Very hard, hard place to get to, tough place to get to. We've been a No. 1 national seed in '15 and '19 and didn't get here. Just goes to show you how difficult it is.

And just really proud of our guys that have gone through this season. And playing good baseball. Looking forward to the next challenge.

Q. Roch and Dean, could you speak about what it means to take UCLA back here to Omaha? Everybody knows how it's tough to get here. Talk about how it is to take this storied program back to Omaha this year.

DEAN WEST: It's been a long time since we have been back here. Last time we were back here was 2013. And we want to come back here put our name back out there on the map and show everyone what West Coast baseball has to offer.

ROCH CHOLOWSKY: It's really special. We've got a special group of guys. We've dealt with a lot of adversity through the year. Just getting back to Omaha where the Bruins should be is really special to us.

Q. You guys were obviously here a couple weeks ago for the Big Ten Tournament. What were talks like after that game against Nebraska? And maybe how it helped you guys refocus for the NCAA Tournament

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played Michigan. We played Iowa. We played Nebraska in front of 15,000.

I thought, like Roch said, we could use that environment to our advantage. We haven't lost since that game.

So in many ways I think we can't get too comfortable, right? I told the guys, it's not about getting comfy here and losing that edge that we have right now. I think at the end of the day, baseball is baseball.

That's what's great about our team. We like to play anywhere, anytime, against anybody. I think they'll just treat it like another game. But at the same time, I have to say that being here for a whole week in Omaha and seeing where you want to go, right? A lot of teams talk about Omaha, but they haven't seen it. We had the advantage of seeing it and loving it and wanting to get back to it.

At the end of the day, I've got to believe that we could use that to our advantage.

Q. Can you just speak a little bit about what Roch has meant for this team? Grown as a leader in his offense and defense. He's been great in all aspects this year, it seems.

JOHN SAVAGE: He really has. He's as good a player we've had. We've had some monster players. We've got 30 Major Leaguers. So I think he's gotten on a path of that route.

He's just a winning kid. His feel for the room, his feel for his teammates, his feel for games. His IQ, baseball IQ is extremely high.

We had one of the best shortstop, American shortstops over the last 15 years in Brandon Crawford. He was a phenomenal shortstop. He reminds me of him on the defensive side. They love playing defense. They love being the quarterback. They love handling that 9-on-1 proposition.

You don't see many guys who are defensive players of the year that are also the player of the year.

That goes back to special guys, over 20 hit-by-pitches, walks. Just playing the game. He just plays the became to win. So I think it just rubs off on other guys.

It takes the selfishness off some guys and gets them unselfish. At the end of the day he's just a winning player. He's been very loyal to UCLA. He played third base last year. He hit over .300. Had a good freshman year.

But at the same time, he's a true potential Major League shortstop. We're lucky to have him, but he certainly is one of the guys. He's a leader, but at the same time he's a true Bruin. At the end of the day, all he cares about is winning.

Q. You mentioned Roch, obviously there's been a ton of talent in the UCLA program, but as your players mentioned, haven't been to Omaha since you won it all in 2013. Outside of the individual players like Roch, what makes this team different than some of those that came up short in the past?

JOHN SAVAGE: I think it's really hard to get here, number one. You've got to have some breaks. You've got to have match-ups. You've got to have health. There's a lot of things that go into it, like I said earlier.

We had three double plays in the regionals and super regionals that swung those games. We had some dog fights with ASU and Irvine and, of course, UTSA.

So I think we've learned from that. We got through that. We played at home. I think anybody would want to play at home in regionals. You look at percentages, super regionals at home and home records for Omaha teams. And I guess it certainly is an advantage, and things fell right for us.

UTSA beat Texas. Then they came to us and then we were one of the last regional sites. I think we're a 15th seed. So things fell right.

Like I said, we were really good in '15. We were really good in '19. We were really good in '20. COVID hit us. We won 40 games in '22. We've won a lot of games. But we just hadn't knocked the door down, haven't got here.

Sometimes that's how people judge you. That's how Major League teams are judged, by playoffs. They're judged by getting to the World Series. Some of them have really good years. But at the end of the day, it's about playing here, like Roch said, playing in the middle of the country in the middle of June. We got here.

And the one thing, too, I don't consider us a young team. You can talk about our youth. We have a lot of sophomores, sophomore, sophomore. 37 of our 40 players are home-grown players. They're all recruitable players. We're not really a portal operation. We're not. But they've played 115 Division I games, a lot of these sophomores.

There were junior colleges in California that were older than us last year. That's how things are stacked up. With the 20 rounds of draft, there's a lot of really good college



baseball players that have already been scouted that are 21, 22, 23 years old that are not prospects. That's the truth be told.

It's unfortunate. They're still really good players. They can still possibly be a professional. They're going to get their degree. But there's been a logjam. And hasn't really been a log Jaime for us. Our juniors go out and sign and play and that's kind of been the cycle, a three-year cycle at UCLA.

Really the last couple of years, the last thing you want to be is young in college baseball, college football, college basketball. Ask any Division I football coach or basketball coach; youth is not where you want to be.

That model used to work. But that model doesn't work as many freshmen as we had.

So, now if they turn into super sophomores, like we have now. Then you wore it last year and now you come back and it's paid off. But some people don't have patience and people say this or that that.

But to our credit our kids have stayed together. They believe in one another. They're really good players. And there's a lot of future high prospects on our team other than Roch -- Roman Martin, Dean West, Levu, Cash Dugger. We have a lot of guys that are good prospects other than Roch. I could go on and on about the landscape of it.

And the West. Look at the West. You've got three regionals on the West. You had 11 teams from the West in three regionals. You could only have three teams that came out of it. That's it. That's all you can have. Irvine or us are going to come out if it -- or ASU or Fresno. That's it. The three are done.

Look at the Oregon Regional. Arizona comes out of that. Oregon State has to come back and beat USC. USC had a really good team. They beat them twice. Then you have three times got through the super regional. It's really cool. I think that's the first time since 1988 that you have three ex-Pac-12 teams playing. That's pretty cool. That's a credit to Arizona and certainly a credit to Oregon State.

That's pretty cool because I was a Pac-10, Pac-12 guy for a long time. It has a long history in Omaha. I think it has the most national championships of any conference. USC had a lot to do with that obviously. But I was part of one in 1998 at USC.

And then we built something at UCLA, played for a national championship in 2010 with Gerrit Cole and Trevor Bauer, two really good players, two legit pitchers. In '12, and then

finally unlocked the door down in '13. I don't want to carry on too much, but I just think it's a hard place to get to. That's all I can tell you.

Q. One of the biggest offseason stories outside of coaching changes was Jackie Robinson Stadium, the last question you were asked, what made this team so different. I want to ask, how did this team navigate that fall?

JOHN SAVAGE: It was hard. The first day of school in September we were told, hey, you've got to be out by noon. I mean, it was like the Colts leaving Baltimore in the Mayflower trucks. That's what it was like.

You've got to be out by noon. Taking stuff out of the walls, cords, TVs, this, this, you've got to leave the ballpark. That was the first day of school.

For a freshman who committed to UCLA now is being told, hey, you don't have any home. And but credit to Cody and, of course, to Roch and Michael Barnett, the leadership, we built a little clubhouse on campus and we worked out of there and we worked on the intramural field. We worked on the intramural field during the fall. We worked out at Harvard-Westlake, Notre Dame High School, Birmingham High School, LA Valley, some phenomenal places that helped us. We bussed every day to those places. We got back in January.

It's been a long ride, but our guys stuck together. They were on the buses a lot. We were in LA traffic a lot. So there's a lot of time spent with one another, probably outside of the NCAA hours in a lot of ways because we were in traffic.

But at the end of the day they grew. And it felt, at the end of fall, I knew that we potentially had something special. I was just hoping the talent, we had enough talent. The makeup was there, the character, the loyalty, the toughness. That's great to have all that but you've got to have talent at this level.

And talent, I think, really showed throughout the year to get where we are today.

Jackie Robinson Stadium -- we don't have any decision yet. We're still up in the air on that. I think July 1st is the date. So we're just going one day at a time.

We love playing at Jackie Robinson Stadium. We love that Jackie played at UCLA, played four sports at UCLA. They love it. They love Jackie. And they loved the fact that they were honored to be a UCLA Bruin playing at Jackie Robinson Stadium on the veterans grounds. It's pretty



cool.

There's a lot of tie in there, a lot of buy in there. But we just hope, knock on wood, that we can play there over the next several years.

Q. You talked about it earlier about just the West Coast and kind of the resurgence or renaissance this year. Coach Hale talked about the struggle going against SEC recruiting that's become strong in that area. And then the coach from Oregon State, Canham, was talking about his pride being from the northwest and the history. Can you just kind of reflect on what maybe has been the catalyst for the success of the West Coast teams this year and what the history is that you're bringing as a region here to Omaha this year?

JOHN SAVAGE: I think the dialogue is West Coast baseball is dead, and it's moving all to the Southeast and Atlantic coast. And we have lost a lot of players to that area.

But I've always said you can win a national championship with players from Santa Barbara to San Diego. I'm telling you, they're all over the place. And then you include Central California. You include Northern California. There's players.

But it's become harder. It's become harder to -- this was a number one recruiting class in the country, this Chollowsky class. They've stuck together and they're as good as advertised. A lot of classes are not as good as advertised. We had a class several years ago that wasn't quite as good.

And things have changed. You can get hurt in the draft now and be perfectly fine with the portal, where before, oh God, LSU got hurt in the draft or UCLA got hurt in the draft. Those days are long gone. You can recover within 48 hours.

I don't really like it because I believe in evaluation of talent and I believe in development of talent. And those are still pieces of the pie in terms of success. But a little less now because people can get good without developing. People can get good without evaluation. People can get good by looking at rankings.

And people tell -- back when I started, nobody told us where the good players were. You had to go find them. And things have changed because of Perfect Game and this and that and different rankings. And that's fine. It's great for the notoriety of the game. It's great for the player. They can say that they're ranked No. 3 in the state of California, whatever.

But at the same time the true evaluation of the game has been knocked down, and people are telling coaches where to go now, where before coaches had to go find players. So I don't mean to sound old -- I apologize if I am -- but I still think there's a talent of evaluation. I think there's still a talent of development that we are showing that in this era.

And it's hard. It's a hard model to go down. It really is.

Is it sustainable? I don't know. If we're here next year, then I guess you could say, you know what, that thing worked pretty good for a couple of years. But at the same time, right when you think you have something, you don't.

And so I'm excited for the West Coast. I know the coaches on the West. I know the leagues on the West. Look at UC Irvine, Ben Orloff is as good a coach as there is in America. He is. I can tell you that by playing him.

Pat Hallmark, who I just played against, at UTSA. He's not in the West, but you're talking about a phenomenal coach. You're talking about a winning coach, a coach that knows how to build a program.

I admire guys like that. I really do. And I told Coach Hallmark, you can feel good coaches. You can feel real players. You get beat sometimes, how do we get beat by them, they're not that good.

Or you know what, we just got flat beat. They're a better team, better coached, better prepared. When you say that sometimes, it's baseball. But at the same time I think there's still a lot of good players on the West. Look at the Major League rosters. There's still a flood of players from the West.

Now a lot of their resumés have changed a little bit currently the last 5, 10 years, from different parts of the country because of facilities and money and exposure. That's the hard part on the West. We're still battling a lot of those fights. We have the best weather in the country. Okay, nobody can argue that. LA is the best weather in the country. Okay. No one has better weather than Los Angeles. I truly believe that.

So we've got that, and baseball is an outdoor game. If you want to be a Big Leaguer, it's nice to be outdoors every day and work outdoors and take ground balls and hit outdoors and so on and so forth. So there are a lot of selling points certainly on the West. It's just become a tougher game, no question about it.

Q. Curious on how you approach this tournament specifically. Is it a four-team tournament like the



regional? Pitching-wise, specifically? Or do you have to have the longer term and bigger picture in mind?

JOHN SAVAGE: I'm just glad to hear somebody from Orange County. Good to hear from you. Yeah, it's two regionals. Simple math. It's two regionals. It's very important you win the first game, that you don't get dumped into the loser's bracket. You're not really concerned -- I'm not concerned about Arizona and Coastal Carolina and Oregon State and Louisville. Right now. There's no reason to. You're in your own regional.

And you've got Murray State, who is as good as team as there is out there. People say they're Cinderella. I don't really look at any Cinderella. We played Stony Brook in -- was it Stony Brook? Yeah, Stony Brook in 2012, and they beat LSU at LSU to win that regional. That's all I need to know. I looked at Murray State and they had to go through Ole Miss. They had to go through Duke. They had to go through Georgia Tech. That's all I need to know.

I don't need to think that they're a Cinderella story. They've got really good players. They are very well-coached. They've got pro players.

So, yeah, it's a regional. You've got LSU and Arkansas clearly on the other game. That's the feature game, right, we all know that's the feature game at 6:00. We're the other game at 1:00, and then it turns into a double-elimination tournament. We played three teams in the regional, which is a little uncommon. We played Fresno. We played ASU. We had to beat Irvine to move on.

So we're battle tested too. UTSA, all you need to know, they went through Texas. They got Texas twice. They didn't even play in the if-necessary game. So that means that UTSA is really good.

So everybody here has been tested. And Murray State, they've been good all year, like UTSA, like I said, you win 40-something games, it's not like they're hot. They just got hot. Not really. I mean, they were good from day one, and so we respect the game. We go one at a time, all those things. Murray State is the next opponent. We're focused on Murray State. We're not focused on anything other than that.

Pitching side, I don't know exactly what the question was, but we haven't had a monster number one all year. We kind of pieced it together, and Barnett's kind of stepped up as that guy, and then we move on to Stump or Moss or something like that. At the same time, it's a tournament; you go one day at a time.

I look at it as two regionals. I love the format. I think it's a fair format. The best two out of three. I love that.

I was the pitching coach in the 2014 game with Arizona and USC. And that was a one game. Arizona State had this many losses when they lost that game. They didn't get beat twice. And we had one loss. We lost to Arizona State. I take that back, we lost to LSU that first game. And then we beat Mississippi State and Florida. And we had to beat LSU twice. I don't know when they turned it into double elimination. But that was a CBS 10:00 a.m. game at Rosenblatt, 1998, 21-14, one game, winner takes it all.

This is a really good format. It's an exceptional format. 75th year. They know exactly what they're doing. It's a phenomenal tournament, and we're just excited to be back.

Q. Earlier you mentioned Cody's name. How much of the situation around Cody Delvecchio can you reveal? How much of an impact do you project him having on the College World Series this upcoming?

JOHN SAVAGE: It's a tough situation because the academic ineligibility is real. We're on a quarter school system. I don't know if anybody is familiar with the quarter system, but you have three 11 week sessions, and you get evaluated off each quarter. You have to pass two out of three classes and have to meet a certain GPA. Any academic institution knows this.

But the semesters are quite different. Semesters you get stamped in January and you're good to go the whole year. In a quarter system, you can get knocked off in March, right, end of March. That's what happened. He pitched and pitched for us and then he had to meet his grades for the fourth quarter, truth be told. And he's done that.

As of now, it looks like he is eligible. He is with us. He's certainly going to be able to be a big piece out of the bullpen for us. He's not the magic man. He's not going to be coming out of -- we've won a lot of games over the last two and a half months. So he's just going to be another piece into our bullpen.

But he's worked very hard. He's been with us every day, practice-wise. He's thrown a bunch of simulated games, a bunch of live at-bats. He's up to par. He's ready to go.

But it's nice to have -- it's like bringing a guy up for the playoffs from Triple-A. It's unusual. Wasn't sure we were going to get to this point but looks like we're there now. And that's good for him and good for us.

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