

# 2025 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 12, 2025

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**Arkansas Razorbacks**

**Coach Dave Van Horn**

**Cam Kozeal**

**Zach Root**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joining us are members of the Arkansas Razorbacks, head coach Dave Van Horn and student-athletes Cam Kozeal and Zach Root.

DAVE VAN HORN: Obviously it's great to be back. It just never gets old. It's such a challenge to get here throughout the season. So many ups and downs. All the teams deal with injuries and other things.

Just so proud of this team that fought so hard to get here. They deserve to be here. With that, just excited to get it going on Saturday night.

**Q. Zach, how much confidence does it give you that your team is fielding .984 behind you, the best fielding team left in the bracket? You're going out there and pitching knowing those guys will make plays behind you all day.**

ZACH ROOT: It's great. It allows me to miss over the plate more and let them put it in play because I know my defense behind me is going to make outs.

**Q. Cam, with all those kids yelling your name, they were trying to get your attention. First, is that something, did you expect it to this level and what did you think of it?**

CAM KOZEAL: It was a cool feeling. It's good to be back in Omaha. Give my dad a hug there on the warning track. I saw him pregame on the field. I told him should have mowed because the grass is really long. That's okay.

It's a great feeling being back. A lot of kids, some of my siblings were in there. It was kind of cool to see all those little faces and smiles. It's cool.

**Q. Is it kind of almost surreal that when you think about your journey and the field you have back at the farm and all that just reflecting on being here? It's almost like a story book story. It's really quite a journey.**

CAM KOZEAL: It is surreal. It's a dream come true. It's a cool journey. It's very fun. It's a lot of blessings. Took a lot of people to get here. It wasn't just me. A lot of coaches throughout the years. My dad, obviously. All my siblings. All the time I spent with them. It's good to be back in Omaha.

**Q. Cam, I've known you a long time. For you to give your dad a hug on the field and say "I love you, dad" on Father's Day weekend coming up, is there a better Father's Day present that you can give that man?**

CAM KOZEAL: I think that's a pretty cool gift. I want to take him duck hunting this winter in some pretty cool places. That would be a pretty cool gift also. It's a special moment special moment for me and my family. Glad it could happen here in Arkansas and to happen here in Omaha. It's a cool place to be.

**Q. Zach, everybody is talking about Cam's unique connection to Omaha. Coming from East Carolina, is there anything extra special about -- you're not playing for the Pirates bow, but anything special about carrying on that hope of reaching Omaha and now doing it in your career?**

ZACH ROOT: Every baseball's dream in college is to make it here. Like Kozeal said, the team is living it. There's a lot of teams that are in D-I and want to get here, and only eight get here. It's such a great feeling to be one of those eight to get here.

**Q. There are very few players in this series or in college baseball today that even know what Rosenblatt Stadium is. I know it's a very special place in your family's history. Can you speak to your knowledge and understanding of that place that you gained**



**growing up and maybe how your family felt about this stadium up until a few years ago?**

CAM KOZEAL: So when everything was getting moved from Rosenblatt and they were tearing it down, I know the city -- even my family -- we were kind of disappointed. We had a lot of memories in that stadium. Grew up running around that stadium. Jesse Cuevas was the head grounds guy. My dad has some sayings, he says, "viva la Rosenblatt," every time we drive past the hill where the stadium is at.

Before that stadium got tore down, I know when it was still really nice, that final season me and my dad and brother, Carson, we went out there for a couple of hours. I was pretty young. We just hit and played out there for the longest time. It was just us three in the whole stadium. It was a really cool moment.

But when we moved to the farm in Sargent, Nebraska, on the whiffle ball field we had the final out at Rosenblatt on a Rosenblatt scoreboard in left field of our whiffleball field. That was really cool. I have a lot of cool memories there. It was a really cool stadium.

**Q. Can you guys maybe share what Reese Robinett is like as a teammate, a guy that didn't start the season out playing too much and now has worked in? And, Cam, specifically with you, did he help you at all in the transition to first when he started playing there this year?**

CAM KOZEAL: He's the best teammate. Love playing with him. Love playing on the right side with him. A kid who has stayed in the program. That's not something that happens every day.

We're so happy for him as teammates that he's here. He fits Arkansas really well, that blue-collar kid from Missouri. We love hanging out with him. He's a really good first baseman. He can really hit, too. Love playing with him. I love Reese.

ZACH ROOT: Yeah, he's one of the best teammates. A guy like him who hasn't had the playing time the previous years that he might have wanted it. And this year it's really easy to kind of sit back and not work as hard.

But he's one, if not the hardest worker on the team. I mean, it showed. He gets his opportunities and he's shined up to this point.

**Q. Cam, first off, have you shown any teammates yet the local fishing spot that you like? And secondly, this team looks very loose. The last couple of years**

**playing at home hasn't gone your way, but this year you get that first win over Tennessee. It's like a breath of fresh air. The entire atmosphere is just unprecedented, uncomparable around college baseball. Just a very loose group. Describe the vibe in the clubhouse right now.**

CAM KOZEAL: I've not shown anyone my fishing spots yet. I don't know if I will. Maybe a couple select few. But we're here to play baseball, first and foremost.

This team is so loose. It's a group of guys who like to be around each other. It's easy to be loose when it's like that. You don't want to play scared or anything, especially in the postseason. You just want to play free, play loose, have fun. That's what this group can really do. So we're excited to be here.

ZACH ROOT: I mean, at the end of the day we're playing a kid's game. Why not have fun? I mean, like I said, we're one of eight teams left playing this season. I mean, it's no time to start playing timid or anything. Just go out there play how we have been and good things will happen.

CAM KOZEAL: I would say we're all very competitive athletes. But we all have personalities that are different. So you have to be a competitive athlete to get to this point, but you can also have a smile on your face when the time permits it. We're really good at doing that.

**Q. Zach, these last two starts, especially, you've kicked it into gear as an ace, whether it's velo, the emotion. What would you attribute it to going into Omaha?**

ZACH ROOT: Just keep the train rolling. I want to go out there, set the tone for however long we're here and just put my team in a good chance to win.

**Q. Could you just talk about going through the gauntlet of the SEC, how it prepares you for this. Is it kind of ironic that you end up facing LSU after all these games? And will that maybe help or hurt the familiarity with them?**

CAM KOZEAL: I love playing in the SEC. Power arms. Power bats. A lot of great players. It prepares you for the postseason. You play a lot of really good teams in the postseason. You play good pitchers, and the SEC has the best pitchers. It prepares you for this time of year in a great way.

ZACH ROOT: I feel like we were going to face LSU at some point in this next week and a half or so. So why not just make it the first game and get it out of the way? But



the gauntlet just provided us with a chance to go out there and face super regional in Omaha caliber teams. We're battle hardened and we've seen every possible punch thrown at us. We just rolled with them and it is going to be a good week.

**Q. Cam, you are going to inspire a lot of kids this weekend in your hometown. What message do you give them if they want to one day get where you're at?**

CAM KOZEAL: Be a hard worker. Do things the right way. Have a smile on your face when you play. Play with perspective. Just play free. Have fun when you're playing this game. Never burn any bridges. Be a great teammate.

When you look back and you look over your career and you think about people, you're not going to think about how many home runs or strikeouts or walks or anything. You're not going to think about that. You're going to think about how they treated you and how they made you feel. Just be a great teammate throughout your career.

**Q. Cam, one more about the Omaha connection. When you were going through the draft process as a senior at Millard South and you heard from teams and you talked to your advisor at that time and there were opportunities for you, the decision that you made to stay firm, how much did that have to do with the hope and the possibility that some day you could be here in this stadium?**

CAM KOZEAL: That was a big part of it. Going into my senior of high school, I wanted to play in Omaha. I knew I just wanted to be in these shoes right now. I wanted to play in Omaha. That definitely factored in that decision. I'm glad it came true.

**Q. How much would it mean to get this championship for Coach?**

ZACH ROOT: I mean, it would mean the world to him and it would mean the world to us to be the first team to get it done for him. He's one of the best coaches in the business. It shows. Everyone respects him and everyone thinks of him as one of the best. There's just one last thing that's missing from his trophy case, and we're going to go get it for him.

CAM KOZEAL: Couldn't have said it any better. Let's get the job done.

**Q. We've talked in the past about how hard it is to get here. Getting to Omaha is a difficult thing. Could you talk a little bit about what makes this so special and guys like Aiden Jimenez who stepped into a big role**

**down the stretch?**

DAVE VAN HORN: They mentioned it. What makes it special, these guys, they really like each other. They're kind of throwbacks, a lot of them. They're gym rats. They hang out at the ballpark. We have nice facilities, nice locker room areas.

Now we have, I don't know what you call it, but we're calling it a pond back there behind the center field wall. I've got 15 guys fishing out there all the time. They're out there in little boats. It's comical. I love it.

They just get along and like each other, like I said. And they're talented. And if the rest of my coaches were sitting up here, they'd say the same thing. They make it fun to come to work every day. They make it like it's almost not a job.

It's really not a job, just a way of life anyway. But they're a fun bunch. There's personality there. I think they've really just grown as a team, really since probably the second week of fall practice we've seen it.

**Q. Back to a regional format this weekend. What's your plan for pitching in the openings of game one and two?**

DAVE VAN HORN: Well, right now, I mean, obviously we're going to throw Zach on Saturday. It's no secret. The Monday game, I'm not sure yet. So we'll just take it from there. I mean, honestly let's just get through Saturday and go see what happens.

**Q. Given last year, how vindicating is this season offensively been for you and for Coach Nate Thompson seeing what he went through the last year and the offseason?**

DAVE VAN HORN: Statistically, it's been good all year in a lot of different categories. The last couple of years, we've fielded well and we pitched pretty good and the hitting has been up and down.

The difference is we're just more balanced. We have a better lineup. Guys are having good seasons. And great job by Coach Thompson and Coach Wernes. And we've got some new guys and some guys got better that were here. We brought some other players in. They're having maybe the best year they've ever had.

When you get guys that keep getting better, it's a good feeling as a coach. Feels like you're doing something right. It's been a good feeling know that some games you just gotta outscore people by a lot. You've got to hit your way



to a win, and we can do that.

**Q. You and LSU both have guys who can throw it 100 miles an hour. You're not the only other teams here and not the only teams in the country. Your thoughts on the proliferation of guys who really have this incredible velocity these days and where you think that's going?**

DAVE VAN HORN: Yeah, I've said it all year. The arms in our league have been amazing. I mean, the arm strength, I just remember the week down at LSU, they kept running guys at us throwing 99, 100 miles an hour. I think a guy hit 102 that weekend. It was something else.

We've got a few guys who can bring it. So does everybody else. Thinking about playing down in Georgia and I could go on and on -- right-handers and left-handers with big arms.

Kids are bigger, stronger. They train better. I see it staying the same. And I think 97 is going to be normal in five years and maybe even more. It's tough to hit it. They've got to throw it over the plate, too. When you learn to lay off of it is pretty key.

And you've got kids that are -- you've got a 20-round draft instead of 30 or 40 or 50. Kids are turning down the money. There's kids that are getting to college where you go, wow, how did they not take him, or why didn't he sign? Maybe he wanted too much money. So the professional baseball is letting us develop them for a few years. That's what you're seeing.

Yeah, it's been amazing. We could talk about it for a long time. It's not just the SEC. It's all them. All the leagues have guys with really good arms.

**Q. Curious what you learned about this ballpark coming back multiple times, how it plays. And do you give any thought on how you build your roster based on knowing this is where you have to get it done ultimately?**

DAVE VAN HORN: We could talk about that for a while, too. You've got to build your roster to win in your league first, in my opinion. But at the same time you've got to have some guys who can do some things.

You've got to be able to cover some ground in the outfield here, obviously. You've got to be able to play defense. You make mistakes it will cost you. Some days here the ball just doesn't go anywhere. But the winds out of the west, northwest, north, it's going to travel pretty good. Now southwest, southeast -- today I think it's southeast pretty

much blowing pretty much straight in, something like that.

The game's not just all about hitting home runs. Have to be able to do some other things, whether it's just advancing runners and having a productive at-bat, if you don't do that here, unless you can slug all the time, hit the ball over someone's head, which some days it's a lot tougher than others, it's tough to probably get through this tournament.

**Q. What if anything do you address with Cam about the spotlight, the potential for added pressure in this environment? And can you also speak to his development from last fall when you got him on a pretty quick turnaround to this point?**

DAVE VAN HORN: So I did talk with him before we left to come up here about the media and just make sure people are going through our SID. Don't let it weigh you down and turn them down. You only have so much time here and don't look back in a couple of weeks and wish you had done it differently.

Talked about just a lot of the kids who are going to be here and you want to be polite. But bottom line you just sometimes you've got to say no.

I think he gets it. We've had to do that with our shortstop throughout the season. I talked to him about it, too. He just wants to play baseball right now. There's too much for him.

Yeah, I don't know. And his development, Cam's very loyal. I feel that. He's such a good person. When he left, I don't think that was the plan, obviously. And there was a reason he left. Once he got in, we were on it.

I went and watched him play in the Cape. Coach Thompson went and watched him in the Cape. Once he got into the portal we were watching him. So were some other schools.

But once he got to school, just the human part, just wasn't comfortable yet, maybe. I left that school, came to this one. And we talked to this team a lot about we want you to be comfortable here, we want you to love it at Arkansas, we want you to love being a Razorback. It's hard to do. You got guys that are 21, 22 years old. Cam is only a sophomore. Felt it would come.

But he didn't have a good fall at all. He'll tell you that. It bothered him a lot. He felt he was letting people down. He wasn't in the starting lineup at the end of fall ball.

We did a lot of talking with him. Coach Thompson did a lot of talking, our offensive coach, just talking about, relax,





you're here now, you're better than that. We know you are. It's going to be fine.

After he came back from the holidays it just seemed different. You're, like, wow, there he is. That's the guy right there. Now you have to find a place to play them. Because that guy is doing well, this guy is doing well. It's a really good problem for me.

One day I called him up -- I called him on the phone -- I said, what did you think about playing first base? He goes, I'll do whatever I've got to do. I said I've got a first baseman's glove sitting on my desk. You can come get it. We'll talk about it.

I stepped out of the office. I don't know where I went for an hour. I came back, the first baseman's glove was gone. That was that. And he was at first base taking ground balls. The story is my second baseman got hurt in Georgia on a base-running mistake, dove and, tore his shoulder up. And Cam started playing over there more. And here we are.

His development is there. The talent has always been there. The strength is there. I think just mentally he had to know that everything was okay. It's okay. And he's been great, putting up good numbers.

**Q. Heading into this year, you mentioned your team was on a mission. What are some of the traits you've seen, not only this regular season but as the postseason managing all these emotions and you mentioned Cam's return to Omaha here. How have they handled all that and how do you think this team is still mission-oriented despite all those distractions?**

DAVE VAN HORN: We came in second in the SEC. Texas won the league. We swept Texas at our place seventh or eighth weekend of the 10 weeks. But we still couldn't catch them because they had such a big lead. We still had to -- I think we just played at Georgia, at Florida, at LSU. Tennessee was coming in. That's the way we finished.

It's, like, we just kept going, whoo, here we go. I think it made us tougher. It made us stronger.

I don't know. These guys, I wouldn't say so much chip-on-their-shoulder-type team but just really determined team to play and not have the season end because they like playing man. They want to play, they want to win. It's been fun.

**Q. Cam Kozeal, Zach Root this year, Wehiwa Aloy up for Golden Spikes, he was a transfer portal addition**

**last year. There's plenty more transfer portal players on this squad for this College World Series team. Your overall thoughts on this the portal, because this is a compliment, you're part of the old guard in college coaches, your pros and cons as you see it of the transfer portal?**

DAVE VAN HORN: First off, as a coach, you've got to get the right players. Yeah, the talent's out there and the experience, but you've got to get the right ones. You've got to get the right ones that really care.

Quick story. Root pitches Saturday. We went 4-3. Sunday, we get out to a good lead, we're going to win the game; we've just got to get it over with. Our guys, they celebrate a little bit. Zach Root, he has tears flowing. I mean, that kid, that's beautiful. That's what you want, you want guys that buy in that they want to go.

The transfer portal is tough. I have mixed emotions on it. First off, as a coach, you recruit a kid. You'd like to keep them in your program, play some as a freshman, probably start as a sophomore, big-time player as a junior, signs a contract. That's the way it used to be.

In our league, most of the leagues now, they're old. They're old. Hard to play as a freshman. You've got good freshmen that go to other schools, smaller schools, they get it right and then we get them.

And, yeah, it's very difficult, but this is the way I talked to our coaches about it four years ago. We've either got to embrace it or we need to get a different job. And that's what we did. We said, okay, these are the rules, that is what we've got to do. That's what we did.

We've had some really good experiences getting some kids that -- there's kids been sitting in my office, after we had a discussion with them they walked out the door. We just shook our heads and said no way. And they've gone places and they've done really well. We just didn't feel like it was a good fit, asking too much, if you know what I'm saying. Just too much.

What about development? What about the draft coming up? That's where you're going to get 'er done. I'm tiptoeing around your question. It's a tough one.

It's worked out for us this year. Worked out two years ago. Last year, not so good. Although most of the kids we got from other places have come in here, had almost their best years, they've signed, and it's gone great. They come back and work out at our place in the offseason. So I feel like they bought in and they love being a Razorback.



That's important for me. I've been there 23 years now. I went to school there, coached there. I want those kids, when they leave, to feel like I feel about the school. So, man, it's tough as a coach these days. And I know how tough it would be if you were at a really good mid-major and you lose four or five of your players every year that you can't build around them. It would be super tough.

**Q. With the general talk out there about reseeding in Omaha, what are your thoughts on the two highest teams playing each other in game one?**

DAVE VAN HORN: Honestly, I haven't really thought about it too much. I've seen a little bit of discussion about it or when somebody puts something out, people comment on it. We're going to play each other sometime. I'm not all about it. That's the way the brackets read.

If you as a coach want to say, well, if we win this one and that one, that's who we'll play there. Probably. That's the way it is. You've got two SEC schools playing each other. They're both very talented.

I don't know how there's going to be enough seats here on Saturday in order to get them all in here. There's going to be a lot of red here and a lot of purple. I hope it stays calm in the stands a little bit because it could get crazy.

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