

2025 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 14, 2025

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Murray State Racers

Coach Dan Skirka

Jonathan Hogart

Dustin Mercer

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA - 6, Murray State - 4

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by members of the Murray State Racers, head coach Dan Skirka and student-athletes Jonathan Hogart and Dustin Mercer.

DAN SKIRKA: It's so awesome. So happy these guys get to experience this and play on this stage and show the whole country that they belong.

Obviously we didn't come out victorious, but I couldn't be more proud of the fight they showed. They jumped on us early and we weren't able to get that knock. But I was never a doubt that these guys were going to keep fighting, scrapping, clawing and giving us a chance in the end. That's exactly what they did. They've done it all year.

The support, outstanding. Racer Nation, holy cow. So many blue and gold out there. That was awesome. And the people of Omaha got on their feet for the Racers. That's really nice to see.

And kudos to UCLA. That's as good a defensive team and display that I've seen. The play in the first, up the middle, the double play that they turned in the second, the sliding catch in left, the catch at the wall in right -- they just made that look easy on the defensive side.

And obviously they were able to get a couple knocks there with two outs.

Nic Schutte, the pitcher, Schutte, just competed. We knew he would. We've been riding all year. The guy's on fumes. I know he's not going to admit. But look at the work load that guy has done, especially the last few weeks. Just love that dude and proud of what he did.

And Zentko and Oakley coming in and giving us a chance. A lot of really good things to take away. I know these guys are going to rest up and be ready to go on Monday.

Q. Dusty, you guys faced today a pitcher in the Big Ten who had an incredible regular season, and not once this season had he walked four batters. You walked twice today. Seemed like you had a couple of at 'em balls. Can you talk about what was working for him and the approach at the plate that you had today as well as your teammates?

DUSTIN MERCER: You can definitely tell there's a little something different to his fastball. It's a good pitch. Had a little sink to it, down. And up, it rode a little bit. That's tough to be on. You don't know what it's going to do.

Change-up kind of looked like a screwball every once in a while. That's never ideal as a hitter.

I was picking up a little bit out of the hand. He was mixing three pitches, and whenever a guy can mix three pitches for strikes that's tough.

We tried to compete. Fouled off a couple of tough pitches, and then one gets away from him and get a runner on base. That's how we win, usually.

Q. Jonathan, do you feel like it took you guys a little bit to kind of settle into this game considering the atmosphere? Or did you feel like you guys are kind of ready from the start?

JONATHAN HOGART: I thought we handled the atmosphere really well. We worked the counts really well early. Couple breaks didn't go our way. Chased a couple.

The guy's good. The guy's really good. He's starting game one for them in Omaha for a reason. Hats off to him; he's really good, made some really good pitches.

I thought we competed really well. I thought we put a lot of pressure on. Just a couple breaks didn't go our way. They



made some phenomenal plays, like Skirk said. Again, those plays were phenomenal and killed momentum. They played good ball.

But I think we handled the atmosphere as good as we possibly could.

Q. Dustin, you keep smiling. I know obviously the result is not what you wanted. Just kind of talk about the attitude kind of going into Monday, which is the opportunity to be playing here.

DUSTIN MERCER: Obviously, it's baseball heaven here. I was talking about it yesterday. I walked around. I never felt famous before until I got here. Those kids don't care whether I'm going to the big leagues or I'm done playing in two weeks. They just want to talk to me. I think that's a really awesome experience.

I know we lost. That stings, it really does. But keeping that kind of mental attitude of those kids are here to watch us. That's super cool. I mean, Skirk's son, he just loves watching us play ball. They look up to us.

About the smiling, I'm done playing baseball in two weeks, no matter what. So I'm just trying to keep that on my face and enjoy the ride.

Q. Guys, I don't think really anybody here probably expected UCLA to beat you guys with only six runs. Do you guys have a little bit of confidence going into Monday knowing that you held a pretty good offense to only six runs?

JONATHAN HOGART: Absolutely. I mean, hats off to our pitchers; they grinded like crazy. Schutte, I thought he threw really well. He made some pitches when he had to, and just a couple of breaks didn't go his way as well. And Zentko, lights out. And Oakley did exactly what he's supposed to do.

So, yeah, I'm confident in that. I think our offense one swing away in a couple of innings to really take the lead or blow it open.

I'm happy where we're at. It wasn't our night tonight. God's plan. We look forward to Monday and enjoy our day tomorrow.

Q. Dustin, what kind of challenge does it provide as a hitter when UCLA uses the pitching where they do, where they throw the kitchen sink at you, and it's just a different guy every time you come up to the plate?

DUSTIN MERCER: That's always raises a challenge. I

think they did it purposefully. I don't know exactly but I'm sure our numbers are good second time through the order off a guy, third time through the order off a guy. I don't know if it's purposeful or to try to save some arms.

It's tough because it takes a pitch or two to see arm slot. You can't really pick that up too well unless you're standing in the box, arm slot, pitch shape, all that stuff. You can do scouting reports and have scouting reports, but it's different when you're standing in the box and with 20,000 people sitting in the stands.

They did a really good job mixing. That's always tough. I don't care whether it's big leagues or high school, if a guy can execute three pitches he's going to be pretty good.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your bullpen and how they really kept you guys in that baseball game tonight? Does that give you a little bit of confidence going into Monday knowing you have guys that can come in shut another team out for you?

DAN SKIRKA: 100 percent. Especially now you get an off day. I'm sure both those guys will be back. We'll have a full stable ready to go on Monday. Confident (indiscernible) was going to give us a quality start. Like they kept saying, we've got to get this offense going. We were right there. You could feel it. A lot of confidence going into Monday.

Q. You talk a lot about just the resilience of this team and just the culture and never being out of the fight. We've seen the offensive explosion throughout the season, postseason. What's it mean to kind of fight against a pitcher and a team like UCLA that has guys that -- 12 guys that have 17-plus innings pitched and the elite arms they can bring out one after one another, and the confidence you have in this lineup, no matter what the score is, just the belief you have in them to fight and come back and honestly give them their best and give you their best because they trust the process?

DAN SKIRKA: That's from the body of work that these guys have put in. I know that's kind of UCLA's plan, they threw, what, six guys at us today. We've seen that a lot this year with this offense. It's nothing new to try to match up righty/lefty, keep mixing looks, try to find the right guy that's going to get hot and put up some zeros against us.

So that doesn't throw our guys off a whole lot, I don't think. But just when you have done it all year, they are confident. And I think that dugout knows that. Again, we were right there. Decker was so close, two plus plays in the outfield from having multiple RBIs and it's a different ball game.



And then we probably get a chance to go to Kelham and that gives these guys even more confidence. The outcome might be different. That's baseball. That's what I told the guys after the game, just a game of inches.

Couple of their hits did find holes, and the pitch that Schutte made and Call kind of flared it into right field that started their four-run rally, that's baseball. We had guys on that hit it on the barrel and they made the play.

So they're going to be confident. They're going to rest up, and I know emotionally I think they're a little bit drained from the last couple of days in dealing with everything that they've dealt. Really excited to see them come back out on Monday with, not more energy but just the same thing we've always done.

I told you guys, when their backs are against the wall, that's when these guys play best, when everybody doubts them and they're out, and they're back throwing haymakers.

Q. I thought a key moment was when you all finally got their lead-off hitter out after he'd been on base three times, I think. When you have a guy who is getting on base against you and you finally get him out, that's a momentum builder for you, right?

DAN SKIRKA: Correct. Early on, I think they had the lead-off hitter on the first two innings and they scored. I don't think we had the leadoff hitter on until the 7th and then we finally scored in the seventh and the eighth. That's baseball. That's part of our plan. We've got to get their lead-off guy out and we were fighting like crazy to get our lead-off hitter on. Good sound as an offense and defense. They did it early. We did it a little bit late. And it wasn't enough today.

Q. Could you speak to that play in the fourth inning when UCLA bunted with Cholowsky, runners on the corners, how surprising that was or how that turned the game?

DAN SKIRKA: That's one of the weapons they like to use. I asked my assistant who scouts their bunt game, will they safety squeeze with this guy, I know he's a stud. I don't think they will with this guy sure enough they did. And that's just baseball. In the moment they're trying to manufacture and keep adding onto their lead, I was surprised kudos to Schutte and ma Stony they didn't freak out minimize that inning because if they fumble that bunt all of a sudden you've got runners out and we didn't get an out it could have gotten even more ugly.

Q. You touched on it in your opening statement. When you all left the hotel today and the turnout for Murray State, I know you guys weren't there also at the pep rally they had at one of the bars here, a huge turnout. In the stands. Did you ever imagine that you would see this much support for this baseball program?

DAN SKIRKA: Never. Never. I mean, people in town support them, and they know our guys. They see them at church. They see them out to eat. They see them at basketball games. Some people stop by our games. We don't even charge admission at our games. And for now for these people to spend thousands and thousands of dollars to just drive all the way here, get hotels, get tickets, buying all the gear. They've got all the funny T-shirts going on. That kind of cracked me up this morning. Just to see some of the faces, some guys drove in from Florida and from Michigan, and just all over. And to see them and to support these guys, it just speaks how inspirational this game can be and fighting for not just an underdog or a Cinderella but for a great group of guys that have shown toughness and the process again we're going to go back to it that they love each other. People see that and they want to be part of it. Very neat.

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