

2025 Men's College World Series

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Luis Hernandez

Jared Jones

Zac Cowan

Postgame Press Conference

LSU - 6, Arkansas - 5

THE MODERATOR: Now joining us are LSU head coach Jay Johnson and student-athletes Zac Cowan, Luis Hernandez and Jared Jones.

JAY JOHNSON: First off, I want to congratulate Arkansas, Coach Van Horn, the staff. Coming here four years ago from the West, I just felt like that's the program we always have to catch. It's just the consistency of talent, fundamentals, competitiveness. They have it all.

So I just have so much respect for them that this actually means a little bit more, to be honest with you, the respect for the opponent.

But tonight, I said this literally probably two years ago to the day, the walk-off homer, Tommy against Wake Forest, I felt something in my body I've never felt before. Greatest moment in my life. It now has a tied for first, with the ninth inning with Jared Jones, line drive over the second baseman's head. And Luis Hernandez, hustling around second base. I didn't know you could run like that.

LUIS HERNANDEZ: Got no wheels.

JAY JOHNSON: I would coach this team forever. I've been telling them that probably since March or April. And it's because of the character.

And you look at this, Jared came back with the sole intent of doing what we're doing right now being on front of that not just as a player who's driving in runs but as a leader. He's been tremendous in that regard. Set the way for the



team.

We had zero innings returning behind the plate this year. And somehow God blessed us with Luis Hernandez. And we needed character at that position. He's a great baseball player. He's a better human being.

Things are funny how they work out in your life, that we're supposed to play Wofford in the first day of the NCAA tournament. I spent five days preparing for Zac Cowan. And thank God they didn't throw him because he threw, like, 800 pitches in the conference tournament.

What a performance, what a season. First-Team All-SEC performer, and delivered on the biggest stage in college baseball tonight against one of the three best teams.

I think it's pretty cool that rarely does it work out like this. While that game was going on tonight, the three best teams in college baseball were still alive.

Just excited to prepare for a couple more days and enjoy being together and go compete for a championship, because I get to coach guys like this. They're all across the team. But we're not here without you three. So, thank you for everything you've done. And let's get after it.

Q. Jared, take us through the at-bats, the home run and the final at-bat of the game?

JARED JONES: I hadn't been seeing Gaeckle very well this week. He struck me out five times I think in five at-bats. It was all on sliders. My approach is always to be on time for a fastball. I was lucky enough to get one in the zone and put a good swing on it to tie the game there in the ninth.

They brought in Jimenez. He's a great pitcher. Gotta respect his slider and was able to stay on it and do just enough to get it over the second baseman's head. That's about it.

Q. Everybody in the nation is going to see the game-winning hit, also the home run. But college



baseball circles, a video of you talking with coach Jay Johnson, got a little buzz. What went into that conversation because afterwards you've come up in some really big spots for this team?

JARED JONES: Coach Johnson and I have had several heart-to-heart conversations throughout my career here at LSU. Most of the time it's been behind closed doors. Sometimes I wish the media wouldn't see that kind of stuff because you almost put so much into it that when it doesn't work out and if -- then what, you know?

I spent so much time and effort in through this sport throughout my life. My parents have sacrificed so much to get me to this point. And my teammates, I was up sixth or seventh in the ninth inning, so there had to be a lot that had to go right for us to put me in that position. I'm just super grateful for it all. And wouldn't have it any other way.

Q. Luis, Jay has talked about you being the unsung hero often this year. Speak to that at-bat you had. I know you're busy running, but what were your thoughts and what the night meant for you?

LUIS HERNANDEZ: I wasn't looking for off-speed because all day they thrown me off-speed, change-ups and slider in. So, I was looking for off-speed, that I could handle it, and he left it in the middle, and I drove it to left field.

Q. What did you see?

LUIS HERNANDEZ: I think it was a change-up. And whenever he didn't grab it, I started running.

Q. Jared, you hit the ball there for the walk-off. Were you watching it? Did you see it tip off the second baseman's glove? What was your emotion when you saw that?

JARED JONES: I did see that. I thought he had caught it honestly because it fell in behind him. But once I saw the ball hit the grass, I just blacked out in the moment, just celebrating with my teammates. Super grateful.

Q. Zac, two of your better outings this season have come against Arkansas, regular season and tonight. What were you able to do successfully against their lineup both times?

ZAC COWAN: I think it's mainly sticking with the same mindset and trusting Coach Yeskie. Defense made great plays behind me tonight. It was in the same case earlier in the year against Arkansas.

Nothing really changed for me honestly. It's just attacking, sticking with the same mindset and trying to compete.

Q. What Jared said earlier, I know you didn't have the last half of the season you wanted to have. What does it mean to have the success and give your team such a great outing?

ZAC COWAN: It means the world. It means the world when I have the trust from the coaching staff like I do and the defense behind me. And, yeah, like the second half, last half of the season didn't obviously go as planned, but it's going out there and competing every time I'm out there.

JAY JOHNSON: There were a couple outings didn't go as planned. This guy was the best reliever in college baseball this year.

Q. Luis and Jared, you come up there at the end of the game with two outs. Talk me through your approach there to do what you have to do when your backs' against the ultimate wall?

LUIS HERNANDEZ: Like I said, I was looking for offspeed. And he leave the change-up in the middle and I drove it to left field.

JARED JONES: Just kind of been here before. We've had a lot of these games throughout the season of, whether we've had to fight back from being down or team ties it up late, we've kind of stuck with it no matter what.

There's no clock in baseball. There's 27 outs. With our offense it's a tough ask to do. Happy Luis got the job done. And I'm happy I was able to drive him in.

Q. Zac, in Coach's opening statement he mentioned a little bit about his prep work going into facing possibly you when you played in the NCAA tournament last year. Can you detail your recruitment to LSU? And also when did you figure out you were going to get the ball first in today's game?

ZAC COWAN: Going into the portal last year I had no idea I'd end up here. I couldn't be more thankful for this guy to be my head coach and for the guys to be around me that I have around me.

And I kind of found out last night that I was going to get the ball today.

Q. You've seen this thing from all angles now. Can you speak to the value, from your perspective, of getting this done tonight versus it going to tomorrow?



JAY JOHNSON: Stealing a line from the movie "Hoosiers," you don't look at the next step until you've climbed the one in front of you. I think it's really important in tournament play.

Once we took the lead, I started managing in a way, let's get this game done tonight and put ourselves in the best position possible to be successful this weekend.

What a week for Chase. I mean, he did what he needed to do. We just didn't complete the double play right there. Great job by Jaden Noot. Spectacular job by Zac. I thought Zac could be successful in this game, successful enough to give us a chance to win late. And he was a starter last year, so he had extended.

He got us probably three more outs than I thought he would, which was huge. And then great job by Jaden Noot. We knew he would pitch in this game.

And Chase, that's a very unfair line score there. And then Jacob Mayers. We brought him in to strike out Thomas -- who had a ridiculous game, by the way. That guy is a great player. But then he punched the next two guys out to keep it at 5-3. The offense did the rest.

It's a huge deal not to have to play tomorrow night. There is nobody happier in the city of Omaha that there not be a game here tomorrow than Jay Johnson right now.

Q. I can't tell if you're exhausted or emotional, but you talked about this teams ears this, deserves this. What does it mean to you to get them here?

JAY JOHNSON: I'm literally at a loss for words. There's so many thoughts. Literally it's like it's about getting to the ultimate where we're at. And I'm so proud of them for that. But literally about getting five more days with them.

And this is a model team, and there hasn't been much of this. It's been a consistent effort from, whatever, August 24, first team meeting through the ninth inning tonight. I think about the walk-off wins we had at home against these guys, against Tennessee. And they just stay with it.

The mental toughness is really like nothing I've ever seen before, and the investment in the team. We've got guys who are going to go to pro baseball, but it's all about this.

I mean, it's not just a saying. Like at LSU baseball the expectation of the baseball players I'll place the needs of the team above my own. We have so many examples of that.

I'm just really thankful. If you ask me if I had a word or an

emotion, it's just really thankful.

Q. Everybody's going to talk to you about Luis Hernandez and Jared Jones, but kind of talk about you putting in Jake Brown as they intentionally walk Josh Pearson to try to get the match-up with Stanfield. You do the pinch-hit. Talk about that how big that was in the game.

JAY JOHNSON: He's one of our best players. It really wasn't a hard decision. And Chris Stanfield is one of our best players.

The other night against Gabe -- I said this on Saturday night -- he's one of the best pitchers in the entire country. It's not close. I voted for him for SEC Pitcher of the Year in the preseason. That was my pick for preseason SEC Pitcher of the Year was Gabe Gaeckle.

We did not see him at all the other night. He struck out, like, 10 guys. Very uncharacteristic for our team. And it was mostly right-handers.

And Jake is one of our best players, too. It was the time to use him. We needed to score right there. Jake is a really confident player. He's got a good heartbeat. He keeps the game slow. And he's a tremendous competitor. And the exciting part is his best baseball is still out in front of him.

Q. Following up on the Jake Brown, did you expect maybe Arkansas to go to Gibler who was getting loose there? And if they would have, were you going to pinch-hit again and bring in a righty?

JAY JOHNSON: We were not. We were going in the boat. And then it became Gaeckle against Stanford or Gibler against Jake. There was two thoughts going on. It's, I'm getting one of my best players to the plate. He's been better against left-handed pitching recently, number two.

Number three, Gaeckle was getting pretty close to the point where if we had to play tomorrow, I thought, I don't know if they're going to be able to bring him back. And getting Gibler in the game, I also thought would give us a little bit of an advantage if the game got pushed, if we had to play tomorrow.

Q. Obviously Jared had that 0-for-5, five punch-outs. For him to bounce back and show some adjustability, I mean today was pretty impressive. I'm curious, did you have any conversations with him after that? What did you see from him and his ability to adjust today?

JAY JOHNSON: I'm really glad he said what he said. We have a saying, too, like, what happens within the team



stays within the team.

But when you play at LSU -- I'm very thankful for this -- our players have the biggest stage in college baseball. And I guess somebody put a video out of us working after practice the other day. Really all we were doing is what we do in Baton Rouge. And it's more just something to get them lined up and in tune with what makes him the best hitter. And then he has the character to be able to go out and do it.

It's been opposite-field homer against UCLA, opposite-field line-drive single against UCLA, opposite-field homer tonight, opposite-field game-winning single.

It's because he's a great player. Again, just being thankful, he hit 28 homers last year and managed the zone really well. And somehow pro baseball just missed it. And we got lucky.

You know what? To be here, sitting here tonight, that's how it has to go sometimes. I'm just really proud of him. He's the one that's done all the work.

Q. You mentioned some of them already, but can you remember a recent game that seemed like you had to make so many chess moves against what Van Horn was doing and back and forth? Seemed like the whole last six, seven innings.

JAY JOHNSON: Well, first off, I said it at the beginning, I'm going to say it again. He's one of the best coaches in college baseball history. And I don't know that that's anybody or a program that I have more respect for.

We played at Arizona, when I was at Arizona, twice. Two really good competitive games. Coming out here, in '21, it was like, it was a feeling. We have to try to catch these guys. It just seems like we're always trying to do that, whether it's recruiting, on the field, the whole thing.

So this honestly means more to me because of the respect that I have for them. I could talk about it all night.

As far as that, we both are very blessed to have great players. And it's not the move. It's the execution of the player in the game. It's the execution of Jake Brown taking one of the hardest guys to hit in college baseball and staying on a ball and hitting it to left field.

It's Jared Jones staying on the ball against Aiden Jimenez, who had a sensational season. He's a great pitcher too.

Zac Cowan going out there and pitching like a warrior and just doing what he's done all year. There's not many

places you wouldn't look at that and go, First-team All-SEC. And people feel like maybe they're a little bit disappointed.

He was getting the ball tonight. It wasn't really a hard decision in terms of lining up this tournament. So it's not me, and I'm sure Coach Van Horn would tell you the same thing. It's the players executing.

What a game. I don't know if college baseball games on -- or is ESPN Classic still around? They should play that game on loop for a week.

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