

2026 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

West Virginia Mountaineers

Coach Steve Sabins

Chansen Cole

Gavin Kelly

Press Conference



to that process.

The biggest thing, I think, in these kind of scenarios is just for young guys that are excited to be here and want to play great, is sometimes you do have to say no in these kind of situations, because there's always more that you could do. There's always more interviews, there's more excitement, there's more social media. There's always more.

So for them, I think as you get a little bit older and you get a little bit more comfortable, you can be really kind while saying no in some of these situations.

So just talking to the team a little bit about that because they've worked so hard for this opportunity in front of them that it's their opportunity. It's okay to be selfish in some of these situations because it's theirs. They've worked so hard and done so much to do this. So they need to concentrate on seizing an opportunity in front of them, because these opportunities are tough to come by.

Q. Coach, how does it feel this year to have so much support from the community and just fully diving into making West Virginia a baseball school, and do you expect them to show up here in Omaha big for you guys?

STEVE SABINS: There's zero doubt that Mountaineer Nation will be in full force here in Omaha. I think near every politician and a representation from the athletic department and fan and supporter and alumni will be here.

That's one of the most special things about West Virginia is that there's a deep passion for the university, and so it's been a blast just saying, yeah, we've got to get a couple of rooms for the governor and the senator and everybody else, but they've been along for the ride.

A lot of these folks aren't like new to the program where it's like all of a sudden you get to Omaha and you hear a lot of new names. There's a lot of these folks, that's what makes it so unique to West Virginia, is that there's no pro sports teams, and there's no other major university in that state. So we really are the main show.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by West Virginia coach Steve Sabins, student-athletes Chansen Cole and Gavin Kelly.

STEVE SABINS: Super excited for this group of kids. They've worked so hard and sacrificed so much to be here. It's really important for the state and the university and our community. So to be able to do something as a unified group and represent our state is really important to us. And these kids have been right in the middle of it to my left.

So just happy to be here, ready to compete. Trying to keep the guys focused on what's important; that's just preparation of these games coming up.

Q. A little bit of a different day-before routine for you, and I know you're all big on that. What is the biggest adjustment? Shorter on field, obviously a lot more media, and did you have an idea what this would be like going into today?

STEVE SABINS: It's just like right back in Morgantown, Kevin asking me questions in the team theater. It's beautiful.

I think we had an idea. I've been really lucky to have so many friends in the coaching business that have been great at their jobs and taking teams to Omaha and doing wonderful things. So they shared a lot of insight of what this was going to look like.

We've tried to just schedule out everything humanly possible for the kids so they can concentrate on showing up and with good energy and executing what's in front of them. We certainly are a very process-oriented team, and I think that's when we play our best, when we kind of keep



And so we just have an unusual amount of support for a smaller state.

Q. I know you guys have had this business-like approach, but when you walked out onto the field, do you allow yourself a second to see the spectacle and the history of the stadium and what you guys are about ready to get into?

GAVIN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, I've tried to take in everything that we've had, just be present, be in the moment, and be where our feet are.

So it's been a special, unique opportunity to be here and trying to stay grateful for the whole opportunity.

CHANSEN COLE: Yeah, and there's a fine line between soaking it in and then us getting ready to win a tournament. So it's been fun, and like Gavin said, we're extremely grateful and blessed to be here.

Q. Gavin, you catch and play second base at a very high level. For the aspiring college baseball players at home watching on ESPN this week throughout the College World Series that are undecided or contemplating two positions at the next level, what advice would you let them know, and kind of explain how you've gone about it at West Virginia?

GAVIN KELLY: Just be an athlete. At the end of the day, you're playing an athletic sport, so just be an athlete overall. And then the coaching staff has done a tremendous job with making sure that I'm sharp and confident in both positions, whether it's certain practice being at one position or splitting time at both.

And so just preparation and being an athlete.

STEVE SABINS: And choosing West Virginia. (Laughter.)

Q. Gavin, as I was talking to Ben out there, you said he's the best. I'd like to you elaborate on that, what does Ben Lumsden bring to this lineup?

GAVIN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, he's my roommate at home. He's my guy. He deserves everything that's been happening. He's hardworking, but what he brings to the lineup is a special left-handed bat that has crazy pop and has the discipline to have three walks in one game. So, it's really special.

Q. You all played at Arizona State late at night. You all came through the losers' bracket in the regional. You all had the rain delay. Can you just talk a little bit about the adversity this team's faced and how it's kind

of made you all closer?

GAVIN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, I've said it for a while. We're a gritty bunch of guys that are tough to kill, and our offense is relentless, and then pitching staff's one of the best in the country. So it's really hard to beat us even whenever we're down.

CHANSEN COLE: I think all of that just proves how gritty we are and how bad we want to win, not just for ourselves, but for the whole state of West Virginia.

Q. Gavin, coming from Pittsburgh, kind of rival country of West Virginia, what was your perspective on Mountaineers growing up and what made you want to kind of dive into all of this and everything that comes with it from the fan perspective?

GAVIN KELLY: Yeah, so growing up, I didn't really have a college team that I followed or wanted to go to. And early on in my, I guess, high school career, my parents helped me realize that the coaches are going to be the ones that finish raising me. So the coaching staff stood out huge in the decision where I was going to go.

So that's why I ended up here. And then coming here, the hatred for Pitt has been real, and it's been special to be a part of.

Q. You guys have essentially become celebrities in the state. What does that mean for you guys that all your hard work is finally -- not finally, but getting recognized, state level, that you guys, all those practices, all that stuff, it translates to now?

CHANSEN COLE: It means a lot to all of us. We talk all the time about electrifying a state. And we've done that up to this point. Yeah, I mean, we're all humble and blessed to be able to play for a whole state and just win some ball games.

GAVIN KELLY: Like Sab said earlier, there's no professional sport teams in West Virginia. So being able to be a role model for kids or for anyone in West Virginia, it's special. It's truly a blessing, and just like Chansen said, just trying to electrify the state.

Q. It feels like, for both of you, the Cincinnati series stood out as one that kind of got you. There was some weather, maybe some illness, maybe some sickness, what did you learn through that series, and how have you turned the corner since?

CHANSEN COLE: I mean, it's baseball, and it's life. Adversity happens. Anytime adversity happens to us, we



have a saying, Advantage Mountaineers. We're going to battle through it as a group of individuals, and I think everybody on this team knows that we're playing for something bigger than ourselves. So it's a lot easier when everybody can kind of come together and get through it together.

GAVIN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, if I remember correctly, we could have had a chance to sweep that series. So at the end of the day it's baseball. It's going to happen. Things aren't going to go your way. It's a game of failure.

So just being able to respond like we did, and we know what we can do. We understand what we're capable of. So just being able to respond is the biggest thing from that series.

Q. Chansen, you have self-described your mentality kind of as boring. How do you ensure that a boring mentality carries over to the biggest stage of college baseball?

CHANSEN COLE: I think it's just doing everything I've done up to this point and just trusting everybody behind me defensively and trusting coaching staff and just competing when I'm out there.

That's all this game is, is you're going to compete between the lines and understand what makes you good and go out there and execute.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Big-picture question kind of. With all the changes in college athletics, and with the NIL, the revenue share, there's been the thought, then, that there would only be certain teams that would make it this far. Obviously the SEC has done what it's done, and it has five teams here this year, but yet you have Troy from the Sunbelt, Coastal Carolina was here again last year and was the runner-up. Just kind of how do you view, just as a first-time College World Series team, just it appears to be that anybody can make it that is committed to it, and it's not just a certain set of teams?

STEVE SABINS: Good. I think college baseball is in the best place that it's ever been in. And I think the sport's growing rapidly. I think the excitement around the sport is incredible.

I think there are financial realities of the sport, and I think people may have assumptions about specific programs or about West Virginia in general that may or may not be correct.

We have a whole lot of people working really hard on a whole lot of different areas, whether that's Gold & Blue Enterprises, whether that's BioPrecision with us, whether that's the School of Sports Science or Biomechanics and Performance Center, whether that's third-party NIL, specific donors, West Virginia has all of that.

And it's competing at the highest levels in all these areas, and I think it would probably surprise a lot of folks of the amount of effort, work, attention to detail and financial resources that have been poured into our program.

So I've been here for 11 years, and the game has really changed, like you said. Head coach 15 years ago was also not the GM, and those things have changed a lot. And so you're starting to see new positions in college baseball, new roles, new responsibilities. And I think we've embraced that full speed ahead.

Q. Your program has been knocking on the door the last couple of years. Previous to this year, two straight super regionals against top five seeds in the NCAA Tournament. Do you feel like the Mountaineers have kind of paid their dues to get to the College World Series here in Omaha? Can you describe this program's journey the last couple of years and what the feeling is like seeing the blue and gold out there with that College World Series patch on your jersey?

STEVE SABINS: I don't know if you can ever say you paid your dues because there's a lot of things that have to go your way and a lot of blessings that have to shake out for you to end up here. There's great teams and there's incredible coaches and seasons that have been put together at the highest level where people don't end up sitting in this chair right now.

It's certainly been a build. I could give you the whole recruiting pitch that I've been selling kids on for 11 straight years. But in 2017, we cracked through to the regional for the first time in 21 years. And then in 2019, we hosted a regional for the first time in 65 years, and I think that kind of put our program on the map nationally to some extent. And then now we've been to four consecutive NCAA Tournaments, three consecutive super regionals, and now in Omaha.

I would say it's probably unusual that the growth is this linear, meaning regional, super, super, get defeated by the national champs and then Omaha. And you mix in two Big 12 titles in that. So it really has been more of this line, where I don't think that's always the case.

I'm certainly fired up that it has been the case for the Mountaineers. But it's not surprising we've mixed in

first-rounders and incredible staff members and auxiliary staff members, and when you have an administration that basically refuses to put a ceiling on what this program can be, great things can happen.

So I'm just so excited that the work and the commitment level has basically directly been associated with us playing at a higher level each year. So just thankful for that.

Q. What have you seen from Troy, and what are you kind of expecting tomorrow?

STEVE SABINS: Just aggressive hitters, really good arms, a roster that's been constructed with experience. So veteran players that have experience, and a team that's really hungry and won't back down for anybody in any situation. So they'll certainly come out swinging. And we're excited to face those guys.

Q. The guy to your left, Chansen Cole, D-II guy; Dawson Montesa, D-II guy; Paul Schoenfeld, D-II guy. I'm sure I'm missing at least one.

STEVE SABINS: Ian Korn.

Q. What do those guys, number one, mean to the program right now? And when you were recruiting them from that level, what did you see in them, and how have they maybe even exceeded those expectations?

STEVE SABINS: You evaluate and you do work, and the staff does work and they believe that someone can have success to this level. I don't think you could ever say that, but when you recruit somebody coming off a super regional, you're saying this is the guy that takes us to the next spot. This is going to help us make this next jump. So for all three, all four of those guys to be massive impact, top players in the country, All-Americans, is really a remarkable story.

We've had three Division II pitchers in our starting rotation for the last three years. All of those guys, by the way, have become draft picks in their senior year. It's unheard of.

They're transferring after having quality Division II seasons, not getting an opportunity to play professional baseball, coming to West Virginia, playing at the highest level, having success and being drafted.

So when I get to sell that on the phone to the recruit or in person, look at the parents in the eyes and say, why should you choose West Virginia? The proof's in the pudding.

Mentality-wise, those are the right guys. We probably have a little bit of a soft spot for the guy that shows up here hungry, wanting to get better, maximizes his opportunity and believes that he hit the jackpot playing at West Virginia.

We don't always do the best with the guy that is entitled or thinks that we owe him something. So we've been able to get these kids that are going up a level. It's almost like hiring internally someone that's like I'm their guy and I'm going to go maximize everything for them.

So it's more like "run through a brick" mentality. And so our program has evolved and the players that we have access to has evolved and the talent and recruiting has evolved, but I think it's really important for us to stay focused on there's some combination of like appreciation and work ethic and talent that goes into these kids being great here.

Q. Relative to where he was after his first outing and having him in the bullpen now, what does it mean to you to have Ben Hampton in the bullpen?

STEVE SABINS: Ben Hampton?

Q. I'm sorry, McDougal.

STEVE SABINS: Awesome. That kid is West Virginia through and through. Ben McDougal came to a prospect camp filled with high school kids as a junior college pitcher. What's a junior college guy doing here? Had to pay \$325 to come to camp. So we watched him, and he was great.

And the velocity was a little bit low, and we're like this guy must really want it. He's from 30 minutes down the road and basically has come here with his hair on fire for multiple years getting better. And this year, things didn't go his way. He got injured. That's why he hasn't pitched more.

He was a very important piece of winning the Clemson regional last year. He got banged up. Got injured. He basically could have stayed on and rehabbed essentially for the rest of this year and potentially got a year back, depending on the medical and all that kind of stuff, but said: I'm all in. I know I've only thrown three innings, but I want to go make a run with the Mountaineers. I want to go help in the postseason.

I was like, Benny, I can't promise you you're going to get in there. We've been pretty good. We're winning a lot of ball games. And I don't know what type of impact you necessarily are going to have because you don't go from not throwing to throwing five innings. Like it's a slow build.

And the first couple outings were a little bit rocky coming back. Obviously, the trust there with that kid is as high as it gets. We kept giving him opportunities in the ball in strategic situations. Then he's just been such a mainstay for us.

He's a West Virginia legend. I was laughing because my wife sent me like a picture on Facebook or something, and it was like come get five pepperoni rolls for \$15 or something like that because he threw five innings. It was like a promotion in town for pepperoni rolls and Ben McDougal. We're like man, that's a beautiful thing, from not pitching to like local superstar pepperoni salesman.

But it's just like he's one of those kids that it is true, he just wants to fight for the Mountaineers. He believes in this place, and he believes in what we're doing. So whenever he's on the mound, feels like the fastball has ticked up a little bit and the changeup is just a little nastier and the big pitch in the big moment just always lands because it's just pure in what he's fighting for out there, which is a special thing as a coach.

Q. Fans of college baseball have gotten familiar with the idea of pitching labs on every campus in the country, but at West Virginia you guys have a biomechanics lab. It not only works with your pitchers but also your position players. You get some MLB players coming in, working out of the facility often like Paul Skenes, alum Alek Manoah. Can you detail kind of the role that's played in your program, and plus how do you plan on using the biomechanics here in Omaha?

STEVE SABINS: Yes, we have a cutting-edge technology lab that's equipped with motion capture cameras and forced plates that are inlaid in the ground from the pitching mound and the hitters, the batter's box as well with Trackman and a radar system in every cage.

And we have a company that's called BioPrecision, and BioPrecision has really helped us kind of take this thing to the next level. Not only do they work with our players, but they work with players outside of West Virginia. So everything that we offer in that lab is also accessible to professional players and amateur players. So that's a real game changer for us.

Probably the biggest difference between what we're doing -- technology is one thing, and then kind of the buzzword is, can you make any of that actionable? And the reality is that I'm a baseball coach, and we build rosters and we work to get players better, but I'm not a biomechanist, and I don't know how human movement actually works.

So we went and we were able to hire a Ph.D. in human movement, a full-time biomechanist, who now also teaches a class in the School of Sport Science.

So the School of Sports Science had this huge part to basically say: We want to partner with WVU, and we want to partner with the baseball program, and we want to create experiential learning opportunities for students.

And the so people way smarter than me basically got together and said -- one of those things I talk about everybody being all in, you got everybody all in on our program.

So we went and hired the head biomechanist from Tread Athletics, which is a world-renowned lab. So she was servicing probably 3- or 4,000 different athletes, working with all these coaches, doing remote training, all this stuff, and she was responsible for creating reports and making all this information actionable.

And the sales pitch was like, well, you want to work with 35 athletes and teach a class and be a professor and be part of a team and make a run to Omaha, or would you like to service 4,000 athletes and never see any of them and not really work with them face to face?

So for her, her name is Courtney Semkewyc, it was kind of a no-brainer. She's like, I want to be part of a team, and I want to win, and I want to be in the dugout, and I want to make a difference.

And so that's probably the biggest separator. And I don't mind sitting here and talking about it because it's one of those things, like, you can have the roadmap of being good, but actually implementing that process of what we've done is essentially impossible.

And she's a unicorn, right? A Ph.D. and biomechanist that's a baseball rat that wants to be in a dugout and be at practice all day and grind, and like those things aren't -- you can't just go create that person or that system. Not every school has a school of sports science that has 30 students working in the lab and want to create graduate assistantships for that. Not every administration wants to partner with an external academic unit, right?

So there's like all these things that have to fall into place, and I feel like we've been able to just kind of bring all that stuff together and create something that is truly unique to West Virginia. And that's why some of the best pitchers in the nation are choosing to come here.

Q. Gavin used the phrase "hard to kill." You

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mentioned gritty, blue-collar guys. Is that a mantra that you recruit, or is that something that more the guys have to earn, that grittiness?

STEVE SABINS: You certainly try to recruit that. It's difficult probably screening for that all the time in recruiting. I think West Virginia provides some of those challenges naturally. When we get back from Christmas break, I tell recruits that it's always warm and sunny, but it's not always in West Virginia.

So you have to make a decision pretty early on that you have to get your work done and you have to actually work harder than anybody else in the country and you have to do it sometimes in adverse conditions.

So Chansen talked about "Advantage Mountaineers," we just say that. We're also the furthest northeast team in the Big 12. And before last year, we didn't even have covered batting cages.

So to go from no covered batting cages to a biomechanic lab overnight was pretty transformational for our program. We also probably travel the most out of anybody in our league because of the location. Adding Cincinnati and UCF was, sure, incredible for us. We got a bus trip in conference nowadays, which is big league. But because of some of those challenges, kids basically have to make a decision early on, like, am I going whine about weather or travel or any other thing? Because every program has their things that are tough, right? But I think at West Virginia there are just some of those things where you have to kind of face head on and go to work. So naturally these kids are like, this ain't so bad, taking a charter flight to Omaha and doing a little bit of media, that's a pretty good day for a Mountaineer. So I think it's more just perspective and being thankful for the opportunities that we have.

Q. At times this year, your lineup's won games being small ball-oriented with speed. You've won games hitting a lot of singles and doubles. Other times you've won games here recently hitting a lot of home runs. The evolution of your lineup and how it's been able to win games for you this year, could you have foreseen that at the start of this season, and how does that just kind of naturally happen throughout this year?

STEVE SABINS: The lineup's really been tremendous, and we've had a lot of different contributors in that lineup and a lot of different kids step up in big moments.

This fall, I really believed that we were going to have a difficult lineup to get out consistently. We played some fall

games and really performed at a high level.

I moved the lineup around basically until the 80 percent mark of the season. Just a lot of different kids in different spots. And I don't know if that was smart or not, but it felt like a lot of players just got comfortable, whenever you show up to the yard, whatever spot you're in, you just go compete and play. Some guys got hot in certain spots. I was potentially overmanning the lineup a little bit. And for the last 20, 25 percent of the season, it's essentially been the same lineup every time. So I think that's allowed for them to get comfortable, but also just, like, whatever spot I am, I'm just going to go hit, go play.

We do that with pitching as well. We have a lot of guys that are swing guys. So, for example, come in the fifth and finish the game or pitch one inning on the back end or be a starter that you hadn't started a ton.

So we really try to get the whole concept of roles just out of the mind, because it's like if you're a pitcher, go get outs. If you're a hitter, have a quality at-bat, whatever those things are.

So the lineup's been great. I think in the postseason, it's hard to not recognize what Armani Guzman has done in that lead-off spot just from an energy standpoint and on on-base standpoint, and stolen base, big hits. He's had more power. And then I think from the power standpoint, our lineup's evolved. I don't know the numbers, but I would imagine that half of our home runs are in the last 20 percent of the season. So that number is really different.

We didn't hit any home runs the first half of the season, and that's taken off. At one point I felt like Gavin Kelly had five. The other day, there was a video out and it was like, that's Gavin's 16th homer of the year. I was like, Gavin's got 16 homers? Unbelievable. So there's just been a little bit of a power surge here later.

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