

# 2026 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 11, 2026

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**Georgia Bulldogs**

**Coach Wes Johnson**

**Kolby Branch**

**Daniel Jackson**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joining us are the members of the Georgia Bulldogs, Wes Johnson, Kolby Branch and Daniel Jackson.

WES JOHNSON: Excited to be here. Just had a good workout. We're really ready for to play Saturday night. Kind of feels awkward that even though it's still just one week between games, sometimes it feels like an eternity, and our guys are champing at the bit. And we just want to get out there and start playing and continue what we've been doing all year.

**Q. Daniel, curious if you would compare yourself and Carson Tinney, how you guys are alike and how you might all be different?**

DANIEL JACKSON: I've actually spent too much time -- I know Carson is a great baseball player. I got to meet him up in The Cape, and he's a good dude. I know he hit some far home runs and he hits the ball hard. So I feel like we're kind of similar in that aspect.

**Q. Kolby, I understand you saw your brother this morning. I'm curious what it's like to be here with him and how special that is?**

KOLBY BRANCH: We went out and played putt-putt this morning at about 11:00. Got to see the two younger brothers as well, Carson and Cooper. They're pumped to be here. It's a great deal with your family and a great moment to spend with your family and recognize what a cool accomplishment this is for everyone and the family.

WES JOHNSON: I have a follow-up. Who won?

KOLBY BRANCH: I walked in on hole 5. They were

already there. If Kyle got a microphone for the press conference, he would say he won. But I walked in on hole 5, and that's the truth, nothing but the truth.

**Q. Question for Kolby and Daniel. You're both transfers into Georgia, whether it was this year or years prior. That's kind of the identity of this team, or one of them, is a lot of you guys are transfers. I was wondering if you could describe a little bit of the camaraderie aspect inside that locker room and if that has any impact now as you enter Omaha and the College World Series. I assume you guys are all stuck together like glue?**

KOLBY BRANCH: Yeah, I just think that one of the things you don't realize is there's one common goal. Wes talks about all the time we're trying to get to the big leagues. And so everybody that comes into this program at one point or another, they're trying to get to the big leagues.

And that's your common goal, and you're all fighting for a spot that's never-ending competition. And I think when you have competition, that drives camaraderie and that drives a ton of chemistry. And really brings the team together, no matter how long you're together. Might be for a year, two years. Yeah, it really drives the chemistry up.

DANIEL JACKSON: 100 percent. Since everyone got there in the fall, every practice has been great. Everyone gets along together. We're always competing with each other. We have great things going on inside our dugout.

As funny as it is, the whole thing Sour Power thing with the candy strips, it's like a big thing that has brought us together just because it's been fun. We go to Buc-ee's and we load up. And so we have a ton of different ways -- we get along, and love this team.

**Q. Kolby, you being the oldest of four brothers, or you, one of the four, and you're talking about putt-putt earlier, how has that molded your leadership, being the oldest of that group and now being a team captain in your role now?**

KOLBY BRANCH: Yeah, in ways it's similar. You gotta

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lead the way. You gotta do something that your brothers might not have done. Going into college baseball, you know, as a freshman, I didn't have a brother to mold that after. And so with Kyle, Carson and Cooper, they're all going in different roles.

Kind of hoping just to be a good role model for them. Doing the best I can. It's my first time at it, too. And so when you take that step, hopefully you're doing the things right for your family, and you gotta represent your last name.

**Q. I'd like to ask a follow-up about your brother as well. Just the craziness of the last two weekends, I guess, for your family, they're traveling around, they're trying to decide who is going to be in Georgia, who is going to be in Oklahoma. And then kind of the synergy of them being here for this particular game and you guys might even play in two days or three days?**

KOLBY BRANCH: Yeah, it's kind of ironic because we spent the last four years or really all of our lives being in different places and trying to manage that and just traveling to this tournament, going to that tournament, going to the first college game, go to the second college game, going to your little brother's 7-on-7 practice, and all those deals.

And then you finally get to the last spot in my career for college, it's like we're in one area, we're in the same stadium. Kind of a full-circle moment for me at least. I know Kyle and all of my brothers have more years to go, but just having that final full-circle moment in Omaha, it's meant the world to me and my family, for sure.

**Q. I want to go back to the Sour Power for a second. When did you load up to come up here? Did you bring enough sour candy? If you run out, where do you go?**

DANIEL JACKSON: Surprisingly enough, I think you can actually buy it on Amazon. But, yeah, we pretty much just stock up every time we go. There's never a missed opportunity to get some Sour Power. We've kind of been anticipating this trip for a while. And obviously one of our goals was to make it here. So always stocking up ready for a two-week trip here.

**Q. Facing Dylan Volantis Saturday night, what makes him different, if he is any different, from other left-handers, what is that challenge going to be like?**

KOLBY BRANCH: I think he fills up the zone. He's creative with his pitches. He goes with a high release height, a tall left-hander, fills up the zone. Good arm.

We've been preparing for him. So it's just it's a good arm. So you've got to go out there. You've got to take your offensive hacks. You've got to go out there and be confident in yourself and go out there and believe, or that's it.

Just like we've done all year against any good arm. We're going to go out there, be prepared, be confident in ourselves, for sure.

DANIEL JACKSON: I mean, he's one of the best left-handed pitchers in the country. It's all about going out there and putting good at-bats together and grinding them out.

**Q. I believe it's 26-7 against SEC competition. You've got five teams from the SEC here at the College World Series. And yet you haven't faced Oklahoma, Alabama and Texas, and they're all on your side of the bracket. And yet you won an SEC regular season and tournament titles. Talk about the season you guys have had and what you know about Alabama and Oklahoma. I think you've already touched on Texas.**

DANIEL JACKSON: It is pretty unique that we haven't played three of those teams. But going forward, it's kind of just being where our feet are at. First game, Texas. And then play that game and worry about whoever we have next. We know that they're good squads or else they wouldn't be here.

KOLBY BRANCH: I think it's funny that the three teams that are on our side of the bracket we didn't get to play this year. But we feel confident. We've been in the SEC for however long now with this year and then the SEC Tournament and then playing Mississippi State in the super regional. We've been seeing SEC talent all year, for however many games it was, 35 or something.

And so it's really nothing new. That's an advantage for us, I guess. But just another game for us and we're going to go out there and compete.

**Q. Curious if you've done any work on Texas' run game. I think 112 stolen bases for them this year. I guess what does it take to handle a run game that efficient well?**

DANIEL JACKSON: There's a lot of things that go into it. But mainly, it starts off by playing clean defense. That starts at practice working on my stuff, catching, receiving, all the catch/throw stuff, just starts there, and not taking any reps off and being prepared.

**Q. You're from Texas. You played at Baylor. I've been**



**told you never really had any interest in going to Texas. I don't know if that's true or not. Is there any extra motivation playing a team from Texas since you were at Baylor?**

KOLBY BRANCH: I picked Baylor out of high school. I didn't have many offers, to be honest with you. I didn't have an offer from Texas. So having that chip on your shoulder for a little bit. You just move on to different chips on your shoulder a little bit.

It's not about the name on your chest. It's just going out there to compete. That's the biggest deal for me, go out there and compete and win the day and win my at-bats and win in the field and then win the dugout and with the team and the squad and go out there and do the best you can and go out there and be a winner.

**Q. I'm curious what you thought of your first time, I guess, batting practice, taking some swings out there? How did it feel? Did it play like you thought it might?**

DANIEL JACKSON: The wind was blowing out, to be honest. I didn't hit very good on the field. But so I'll leave that up to Kolby to tell you how it played.

KOLBY BRANCH: He opts out on that answer, I guess. Hitting out there was great. Just like any other stadium. Cool to see. You watch it on TV. Haven't been there before. Haven't been to Omaha before.

It's a good feeling to be out there, be out there with the guys you got here with, bringing the squad to Omaha and going out there to practice. I thought we had a good practice. Thought it went well. Besides Danny's round, of course, I guess. But, yeah, we had a good time out there. It was good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

**Q. If I recall the story correctly, back in 2023, you were here in Omaha recruiting for Georgia. If that is correct, how is it like this year recruiting for Georgia playing in the College World Series with the Bulldogs?**

WES JOHNSON: I don't think it's changed. I mean, we're just in that time where, for whatever reason, we have portal season open right now. There's a lot of debate around that. But it hasn't changed. I mean, you wake up and you've really got to -- you better have a good time management plan. You've got to work on, obviously, getting prepared for Texas. And you have got to work on getting prepared to replace your team, making phone calls.

So I don't think it's changed a ton from what I was doing

then to what I'm doing now.

**Q. Over your first three years at Georgia, you've been one of the more aggressive head coaches using the transfer portal. Is it a rewarding feeling getting to this stage with Georgia?**

WES JOHNSON: Yeah, of course. I mean, I think anytime you get here, it's rewarding, right? Whether you've done it with high school kids, junior college or portal. It just means that you've got the right guys in whatever your process is.

I mean, you get guys like Kolby Branch and Daniel Jackson, and you get those type of players, and you're able to bring them in and develop them, continue to develop them, help teach them how important culture is in your clubhouse, and then winning starts to take care of itself.

**Q. You guys just had a tremendous season from start to now. And you're the highest remaining seed. Do you feel like the way you all won the super regional would be in the high seed, you all are the favorite here?**

WES JOHNSON: We don't get into that. I mean, to your point, we're 28-7 now against Southeastern Conference teams. It's been tough. It's good.

But that doesn't mean -- baseball is a game that doesn't care what you did yesterday and doesn't care what you're doing tomorrow. You better win today. So we don't ever look at favorites, underdogs. I think you heard our guys talk about, we're going to wake up today. We're going to try to be the best we can today.

We're going to do that again tomorrow. We're going to do that again on Saturday, and then the game's going to be played and we're going to go take our swings and go in there with our game plan and do it to the best of our ability and see what happens from there.

**Q. Do you feel like you had momentum after that super regional?**

WES JOHNSON: I think momentum, again I'm a little more -- I spent four years in Major League Baseball. A lot of people think you play 162 games, you really play 195. Because you play 33 spring training games. You understand the momentum's just kind of -- it was just a cool term to say a team's getting hot.

I think it's just momentum for me in this game is guys are waking up every day and just trying to win today and be really good at a plan, knowing that Texas has got a



phenomenal left-handed starter.

They've got a good bullpen, but they're different. And so momentum's not going to carry you through both sides of those guys. You better have a really good plan and be ready to swing. So more for us, it's just like, hey, just as everybody does at this tournament, teams who win, they just play good baseball.

That's just our goal, and we want to go out and try to play good baseball.

**Q. You have 67 more home runs than the next highest team here at the CWS. How did you guys do that? And what role did your park, your home stadium, play in hitting that many?**

WES JOHNSON: We get a lot of questions about the ballpark. I'll give you some pure facts that came off of a laser grade that we just shot when we redid our field. It's 350 feet down the left field line. I'm pretty sure we're not in Denver where it's elevation. It's 375 in our gaps. Yes, there's our right field for about 40 feet short -- 40 feet down the line, meaning short, yeah, it's 306 to 330 in that little pocket.

But other than that, our ballpark, we're not the smallest ballpark in the Southeastern Conference, by the way. We're actually the fourth. If you want to get into that.

We don't bunt. We got two sacrifices on the year, which that's just our style. That's not knocking anybody else. We just teach our guys, we want you to try to hit the ball hard and elevate the baseball.

You look at our ground ball rates and those kind of things, that's just the way we teach the game. It doesn't mean it's right, wrong, or indifferent. It's just what we do.

But I don't think our ballpark plays -- like I say, I mean, we're not the smallest ballpark in our league.

**Q. Of course you've got a lot of fans and families coming from all over to see you guys, but we go back to Kolby's family and seeing his parents go from Kansas back to Athens and almost getting rewarded to be here at the Men's College World Series, how gratifying is it to you as a coach to see that for his family?**

WES JOHNSON: It's great. Kolby left out one detail. His second-to-youngest brother was in the state finals in Dallas, Texas. Or, I'm sorry, maybe that was in Round Rock. I don't want to misspeak. I can't remember where the tournament finals are. Somewhere in Texas. So he

had a brother that was in the high school state finals. Then they were obviously in Lawrence and then obviously in Athens.

Yeah, I mean, just to get them here is -- the Branches are phenomenal people. Kolby's been a leader for us the last two years. We could talk about, do a whole segment on Kolby, but I'm just very, very happy for him and his family.

**Q. You mentioned teaching your guys to try to hit home runs. A guy like Dylan Volantis has one of the highest ground ball rates in the country. I guess how do you attack that, knowing that your goal is to kind of hit the ball in the air?**

WES JOHNSON: Yeah, obviously we are playing in the Southeastern Conference. We see Friday night guys every week that are really, really good. And we'll have a chance to play in the big leagues. And here's another good one. This young man's got a chance to pitch for a long time in this game.

You start trying to change the way you do things to combat somebody, you usually get in trouble because your players aren't used to that. If all of a sudden we come out, start trying to bunt, probably not going to have a lot of success. Although we work on bunting, it's just not our strong suit.

So we have to go out and have a good game plan and hunt zones and hunt areas, and, quite frankly, you hope he makes a mistake.

**Q. Interesting player to follow all throughout the season has been Caden Aoki. He's pitched in a multitude of different roles for you guys. He's got over 45-plus Power conference starts to his name. But you guys have used him as a closer, as a bulk reliever, and recently as a starter. Can you talk about his impact and just stability in your pitching staff?**

WES JOHNSON: He's got 74, 75 innings, I can't remember off the top -- 100-plus strikeouts. For a guy who is going to top out at 91 -- if the wind is blowing in, we might get a 92 out of him.

But it shows that velocity, you don't have to have 95-plus. Pitching still matters for some guys. Caden is going to hit edges. He's got four pitches that he will throw literally anytime, any count.

We don't hesitate to call any of them, full count, bases loaded, slider. Full count, bases loaded, curveball. Full count, bases loaded, two-seam. Full count, bases loaded, change -- doesn't matter. We'll throw them anytime. Any situation.

I think that's what makes Caden so unique. Because he's made so many Power 4 conference starts. Very, very slow heart rate out there. You guys know how important that is for a guy to go out there with confidence and slow heart rate. Caden brings a lot to our team.

You see that some of the big leagues, you know, a really good player -- we signed a guy one time, Carlos Correa, he was okay when I was with Minnesota. No, he's really good. And I told our GM after about a month of Los being with us, I said, Whatever we're paying him, he's worth that in the clubhouse. You know what I mean? He's leading, he's helping. That's a little bit of Caden Aoki. That young man's just as valuable in the clubhouse as he is on the mound.

**Q. Can you give us a status update on Dylan Vigue?**

WES JOHNSON: Dylan's fine, would have pitched Game 3, would have started Game 3 for us if we would have went to Game 3 against Mississippi State. You get hit in the shin, you get the real cool big knot on your shin and then it looks like somebody spray-painted your leg a couple days later. But typically you can play through those kind of things. You're going to be a little sore.

But, no, Dylan's fine. He would have started Game 3 for us on, whatever that would have been, Monday, if we would have got there.

**Q. Do you plan to start Joey on Saturday night? Could you describe his style of pitching?**

WES JOHNSON: I'm not going to give you a scouting report on Joey. I'll let everybody else do that. But Joey will go for us. He's come a long ways. Looking at him, I think he's grown a lot, not only on the mound and in the game, he's another guy who has had over 100 strikeouts.

Just really, really good competitor. He's that guy who doesn't want to be taken out of a game at any time, so no matter what the score is or what's going on. And just, really, he's a true grinder out there.

**Q. On Joey, I was looking, I think it says he had seven pick-offs this year. What's the strength of his move to just have that number be so high?**

WES JOHNSON: I mean, there's different ways to pick guys off or control the running game. You look at it. Everybody can get caught up in time to the plate to understand. But being able to hold the ball, being able to vary your pick-offs, being able to mix up times to the plate, really, really make it hard and sometimes make it hard for

good base stealers to take off. And we've got a couple of guys that we intentionally worked with in the fall.

We've got Rylan Lujó and Daniel Jackson. We've got a couple other guys that can really run. Just putting those guys in that situation in the fall to work on those kind of things in the early spring have really paid off for Joey.

**Q. Have you heard from Jay Johnson and Dave Van Horn this week about your experiences up here and their experiences and all that?**

WES JOHNSON: No.

**Q. I got to talk to Coach Fitzgerald at Kansas earlier this year. He talked about the transfer portal and his process. Of course you guys shared some time at DBU. Can you talk about your process when it comes to -- of course you don't want to give away your secret sauce -- I feel like -- but can you talk about what your process is like when it comes to transfer portal targets?**

WES JOHNSON: Maybe I'll answer it this way, right? Because I can't get into what we do. Not that anybody needs advice on it. But I'll tell you what we do.

We are very intentional and focused on what we think fits in our ballpark and what we think fits our style of coaching. We don't care where they play so much, meaning I don't care if they're at Davidson. Michael O'Shaughnessy. It's not like they have to be a Power 4. If they fit our style, whether that be on the mound and/or obviously, then we go after it.

I think that's where you can get in trouble in the portal is you're just jumping out there and there's a portal service that ranks player X really high and everybody feels like they should go after him because portal service whoever has this player ranked number one, well, we don't ever fall or really care about what those rankings are. We have our own system that ranks players and that's the one we really care about, and that's how we attack it.

**Q. You talked about being in a tourney until you play again. You got 48 hours or more. Do you take them to the zoo, play poker, go swimming, what do you do to keep them loose and entertained?**

WES JOHNSON: No, I think tonight will be good. I think the NCAA's done a phenomenal job of putting together a really unique opening ceremony tonight where we'll go do a dinner and then obviously follow that up with the zoo. That will be good. It will be really good tomorrow to get us back into our routine.

Our guys love to practice. I mean, yesterday we were kind of rushed, had to practice in the morning, obviously, before we flew out, and then the day you don't get a ton of time. I think that's what builds and makes it feel like it's so far away because you're out of your routine, which everybody is, obviously. But, boy, tomorrow -- I've even had a couple of guys say, hey, coach, I'm ready to get back to a real practice.

So I think tomorrow will really help. It will feel like we're back in our regular week. We're going to go get a good practice in. Two and a half hours, those guys will get after it. We'll have a lot of fun. We'll come back, eat, and then it will be like a regular Friday night game, even though it's on Saturday. But you'll be back into your conference flow.

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