

# 2026 Men's College World Series

Tuesday, June 16, 2026

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**West Virginia Mountaineers**

**Coach Steve Sabins**

**Dawson Montesa**

**Reese Bassinger**

**Gavin Kelly**

Postgame Press Conference

West Virginia - 12, Troy - 0

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by West Virginia head coach Steve Sabins and student-athletes Reese Bassinger, Gavin Kelly and Dawson Montesa.

STEVE SABINS: Congratulations to Troy on such an incredible season. What they were able to accomplish is nothing short of miraculous. The performance from those kids and that staff, to be able to take what they have and the resources available and to go do what they did is incredible. One of the best teams in the nation. They should be extremely proud and humbled for what they were able to do on the national stage.

We had some heroic performances ourselves and we've become accustomed to seeing that with Montesa, McDougal and Bass in big spots, and Estridge coming in late in that game, and Gavin Kelly and Armani; and a lot of great players making great plays. Certainly an exciting game for us.

I felt like if we had a chance to kind of get some momentum cooking, that's obviously where we want to be going into next game. And we're just excited to be one of the last four teams standing in the country, and want to prepare and get ready to compete for tomorrow.

**Q. Reese, Dawson, you were able to strand 13 Troy base runners on today. What was working for you guys when runners were getting on base and not letting the adversity get to you guys?**

DAWSON MONTESA: It's just like hitting your spots that



the pitching coach calls. They do the scouting reports day in and day out, so you trust them. You trust to execute every pitch they call. So just spotting up a pitch and not letting base runners get to you is pretty important.

REESE BASSINGER: Yeah, they spend so much time doing scouting reports that they're away from their family just doing it for us. So when you get the pitch call, you know if you locate that pitch, the odds are in your favor. So just attacking that zone that they call it in and that pitch and just doing your thing.

**Q. Gavin, how did that home run swing feel? After a couple of games it didn't go your way at the plate, how did it feel to come through there?**

GAVIN KELLY: Yeah, it felt awesome to be able to hit that and help the boys out. And it's funny how it works out because I wasn't seeing the ball great the first two games and kind of pressing. So being able to get that is huge, just to almost like ease it.

**Q. Gavin, that's your 12th home run since the start of May. What kind of clicked for you coming into May and down through the stretch of the postseason?**

GAVIN KELLY: A guy named Sam White. He was on the team last year. I have a really good relationship with him. Talk to him all the time. So Sam White.

STEVE SABINS: Would you care to elaborate?

GAVIN KELLY: He shared some stuff with me. And I have a Sam White, almost, tribute in my locker back home. So he blesses me. He just shared some stuff with me that have helped me almost, I guess, become a home run hitter.

**Q. Dawson, when did you know you were getting the ball today? Just what did you have working for you out there?**

DAWSON MONTESA: I found out at practice yesterday that I was going to have the ball.



I guess what worked today was the curveball. I was throwing it for strikes and chase. That just opens up everything with the fastball and slider and splitter. But just pounding the zone with plus stuff could get the job done, yeah.

**Q. Dawson, a lot gets made from the jump from D-II to D-I. Is there anything that you can look back on and say, you know what, that actually helped me in an environment like this?**

DAWSON MONTESA: Yeah, I mean, obviously I haven't pitched in a game like this. This is obviously the biggest stage I've pitched on. But just realizing it's the same game -- D-II, D-I, you know, Little League, high school -- it's all the same game, it's a children's game. So just going out there and pounding the zone, playing like it's your last game. It's pretty cool.

**Q. Reese, you were showing a ton of emotion out there on the mound. What did it feel like to be on the mound getting the final couple outs for West Virginia's second ever program win at the College World Series?**

REESE BASSINGER: Yeah, that was sick. Those are kind of situations that I really like to be in and I assumed that I would be in in a tournament like this.

When I got the call to go in, I was pretty pumped up already. So then getting out of it, sometimes you get a jam shot and it doesn't go your way. But this time, Paul caught it, makes the throw home, and I strike out the next guy. It was pretty sick.

I somehow made exact eye contact with my dad right after that happened. And he was excited. He never shows emotion. So I don't know how I found him, but it was really cool to do that. And so I was pretty pumped.

**Q. Gavin, between you and Paul, you guys have only had one hit leading into this game. How good was it to see not only yourself but Paul as well get a couple past the defense?**

GAVIN KELLY: That's a fun stat to know. I didn't know that, so thank you. (Laughter). But Paul has been tremendous for us this whole year. He's got no reason to press. His hits are coming. His swing's in a great spot, in my opinion. So his hits are going to fall, hits are going to come.

And for myself, it's just sticking to my approach and being an athlete in the box.

**Q. What did you make of the overall offensive**

**approach, not only the aggressiveness in stealing some bases, making things happen, but the ability to add on as the game went on?**

STEVE SABINS: That's always a huge piece of it. That team is so good and they can score in bunches. So if you're up two, you're, like, we have to extend. And if you're up six, you're going, their big inning, their big punch is coming, it's around the corner.

You feel like you really have to keep your foot on the gas in order to beat a team like that. I think it just so happens that we had some pitchers step into big situations and making big pitches.

But I think it was 7-0 with bases loaded and then all of a sudden you're kind of, man, this is a Janicki fly ball away from being a save situation in the middle of the game. So you're always kind of playing it that way.

But I felt like the offense just did a great job. And the reality is that their starter did a tremendous job, and then they brought in Alonso, who's been their closer for most of the year and has plus stuff. And they really got what they needed out of him.

I think to expect for him to go 2.2 innings when he hadn't really pitched in the last two weeks, I think they got what they needed. So I felt like, man, things are falling their way right now. A closer that they bring in in a 2-0 game that's been able to get extended. He threw 68 pitches. I think that's almost as good of what they could have asked of that kid. He did a tremendous job.

So for us to get a couple insurance runs and stay aggressive on the bases and be able to manufacture some runs -- but Gavin's home run was kind of the game changer. I think it was first and second with one out when Kelly came up. And we weren't running, and we didn't run at first base with Tyrus in that situation, and Armani ended up drawing the walk. Because kind of the goal in my head that inning was get Gavin to the plate. That's our best chance of kind of a knockout blow, is to get Gavin to the plate.

Then he had an incredible at-bat and spun the ball right with two strikes. I didn't think that ball was necessarily out. The wind really wasn't blowing at that time. The flags were dead. He really clipped that thing good. That was an impressive swing.

**Q. I think we were talking about the same point in the game there in the sixth, there's two quick outs. It's an offensive timeout. And at the time I'm thinking you might even just be giving your pitcher a little bit of**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**time. You come back, you get the 3-2 call, a walk, a walk, a home run. And then suddenly it feels like that the game pivots at that point. Is that how you saw it?**

STEVE SABINS: It certainly pivoted. I don't know if it's because of that or, I think a whole bunch of two-out hits and great at-bats and some homers is really what pivots it. But there were certainly a lot of momentum. And it was cruising there.

And Montesa -- you said that was the sixth -- so Montesa had thrown five complete and it went out, out quick. And really the thought process was can we slow down the game a little bit, give Montesa a breather, allow for him to kind of recover and recoup so he can be in a good spot going back.

Because he was at a pretty high pitch count at that point. He's had some higher pitch counts, but 112, and a couple of weeks ago 122 were his longest outings of his Mountaineer career.

And certainly that was the pivoting point. You're exactly right. I felt it. Everybody felt it, but I think it was just more circumstances. Like, it really worked out in that scenario. The funny part about all of that, I was giving Dawson more time. And he came out and he wasn't sharp. His velo was down. We ended up taking him out of the game after he recorded one out.

So I think it almost flipped, right? It went from having not enough time to recover to too long of an inning. And then it was probably too long of a pause, and he wasn't really sharp, and his arm didn't bounce back great after the fifth.

**Q. You first told me about Dawson in September, and you were very excited about his ability. I asked you, can he throw a hundred pitches in the postseason. That kind of thing. Then he starts in the opening weekend rotation and then he works his way to the bullpen. Just his journey, kind of conceptualize that. And what helped you maintain belief that he could do this today?**

STEVE SABINS: Yeah, he's such a special kid. I mean, all these kids, you guys have a great feel for our team by now, just from whoever you choose to sit up here, they present with class and they're real and they're humble and they're down to earth, and they're just a really special group. He's certainly one of them.

He just loves to play. He's a black lab/Golden Retriever -- get him in the yard and throw him tennis balls and the guy will have a blast. But he could play basketball, baseball, hacky sack. During BP he's catching balls behind his back,

in between his legs. He just loves to play.

So anytime you tell him, Dawson, you're going to get the ball, he's, like, yeah, coach, let's go. It doesn't matter if it was a close situation, middle relief, starting in the World Series. He's never shown an ounce of frustration in his role throughout the entire season.

And that guy's a high profile draft prospect. That guy has a good chance of pitching in the big leagues. So you insert that guy on any team in the country and he has a role. It doesn't matter any team, any conference, any situation, he's got a role. It's plus stuff. It's plus athleticism and plus makeup.

For a guy that has gone from Friday to Sunday to middle relief to closer to starting in the World Series games -- in the regional, he threw 122 pitches, came back the next day, threw 10 and it was with better velocity.

It's just like, that character stuff. That's that makeup stuff that it's hard to pinpoint, but once you realize who somebody is, it's so special. He's a kid that we would put in any situation because we trust.

Then our job is to kind of make sure it's in the right situation where he can have success. I thought he's basically the opposite look of Chansen Cole. And Troy handled Chansen well. So you have right heater, big breaking downer, breaking ball and a splitter. Cole is a sinker, change-up, slider. So I was, like, well, we'll try something different. That was more of the thought process.

**Q. I know this could probably be normal circumstance, but the team's strength is base running and stolen bases. So I'll revisit a prior question and just ask, you had seven stolen bases today. A couple of the guys had amazing jumps, so I don't necessarily know if it's the catcher, who's a very good catcher on the other side, did you see something in film or is that just the guys getting tremendous leads?**

STEVE SABINS: I think the guys just getting great jumps. I try to be careful with the whole identity of the team and this and that and what it makes out to. The bottom line is when opportunities present themselves you want to take advantage of them, whether it's offensively or on the bases or defensively or with pick-offs. That's really more of the mindset. We.

Don't proclaim to be base-running gurus or know what we're doing. We just study film in all those areas and when we think that there's an opportunity, try to take advantage of it.

**Q. You were kind of explaining the process of, the thought process of starting Montesa. Can you talk about whether or not that was a short discussion, long discussion, analytically driven or a gut decision?**

STEVE SABINS: Relatively short. I think when you lose game two and you have three games to win to get to the finals, you have 27 innings, and you're saying, who are the guys who can handle a large workload? Who are the guys that have proven to be able to throw 100 pitches?

So at the end of the day, however you want to slice it up, there's five or six guys that need to throw four to five innings for us. And then you need to mix in some other dudes to perform in big moments.

And, so, Dawson was probably the most prepared and had the most rest and had been good. But we didn't show up here to play for second. So you always show up with this mindset of, however you slice this, we're going to need these kids to be good in these moments.

So it doesn't really matter who goes first or who goes second or who's the closer or who comes out of the pen. If McDougal was cruising there after Montesa, we probably would have left him in and not gone to Bass. But he wasn't as sharp today. So we said, give Bass the ball now; McDougal will save some balls because we're going to bring him back tomorrow or the next day.

And so it's really more just about who do we think could be good against the opponent. But now there's only one opponent ahead of us. That's North Carolina for a couple of games. And so we'll need all the guys that are capable and have proven to be effective for us to have great outings. So I think simple as that, really.

**Q. Have you settled on a pitching plan? And can you just kind of take us through some of the options available for Wednesday?**

STEVE SABINS: We haven't yet. You just kind of live day to day at this point.

Cole had a short outing to start this party off in Omaha. Korn threw that same game. So those are two really trusted arms that threw Game 1 of this tournament. So those are definitely options. So we probably will start there.

Hagan has some great outings for us in the postseason. He's been tremendous. McDougal, Bass, Estridge, Huether, Surigao -- those guys have been more in the mix for us.

And then like I told the team, there's other pitchers that haven't been in there as much. But crazier stuff has happened and we're in this position because of those guys as well. You just normally lean on experience a little bit. And if things don't work out, then you end up putting some less experienced pitchers in there.

But that's kind of the game plan as of now. But we'll make a decision tonight and have to turn it around pretty quick.

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