

2026 Men's College World Series

Friday, June 19, 2026

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Skip Johnson

Jaxon Willits

Trey Gambill

Postgame Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Oklahoma head coach Skip Johnson and student-athletes Trey Gambill and Jaxon Willits.

SKIP JOHNSON: Really excited about the finals, there's no doubt about that. These guys have been through it all. It's really about our players. I think our coaches would be -- I don't know the word I'm looking for -- but I need to talk about our coaches because they've done a great job preparing these guys to do this.

We've been through a lot. I think Trey said it best yesterday. We've been hit in the mouth. Played really good early in our year. And then we went through the SEC, and I think the SEC really molded us to be prepared to where we're at.

We're facing a good opponent with North Carolina. I've known Scott Forbes a long time. There's a lot of similarities in our programs. The culture's really big in that program. There's a lot of things -- I can remember when we were assistant coaches out there on the trail recruiting against each other.

But really proud of our team and really proud of our fan support. Like I said, I really believe that our school is a family-owned business and really excited about that.

And want a lot of our fans to come up here and really excited for these guys to go watch these guys play and stay out of their way and let them do what they do. And I'm really excited about it.

Q. Jaxon, you've been opened about you wanted to be an OU player since you were a little kid. Are you able to appreciate that you're about to play in the national

championship, or you're still in it so it's kind of hard in the moment?

JAXON WILLITS: Yeah, I mean, right now I'm just focused at the task at hand. The task at hand is to win two more baseball games. So I'm trying to do my best to go out there and take it one pitch at a time and control what we can control. And I think all of our guys are doing that. We're focused on winning two more baseball games.

And then after it's all over, after it's all said and done, we'll kind of look back and enjoy the moment a little bit more.

Q. Is there anything tough about this two-day lay-off and just the anticipation leading into Saturday night at 7:00?

TREY GAMBILL: I think there's not much difference from the regionals and the super regional. We know we're going to play a good baseball team. We've been preparing for them the last couple of days. And it's not out of the ordinary I think for us as far as a schedule standpoint.

JAXON WILLITS: Yeah, we've had a good routine with that stuff for the last two or three weeks, just making sure we get our work in but making sure we stay healthy. So I feel like we've kind of developed a good routine that's helped us stay sharp and kind of just followed that and stuck with it.

Q. Coach alluded to this, but just what do you think you got out of the gauntlet of the SEC schedule and how the difficulties you guys went through during the regular season prepared you to get ready for this?

TREY GAMBILL: I think the SEC just offers a great preparation, period, for this type of tournament. There's no breaks. Just like in this tournament, you're not playing any bad teams. You're not playing any mediocre teams. You're playing the best of the best.

So, in the SEC, it's similar. Every Friday night you're going to face a guy that's really good, similar to all the teams here, similar to what North Carolina has. So the SEC just prepared us for always being ready to put our best out



there.

JAXON WILLITS: Yeah, I think Trey said it best the other day. He talked about getting punched in the mouth and you have to persevere that. And I feel like you learn how to get punched in the mouth, how to take punches and how to get back up.

And whether you lost the first two games of the series or you won the first two games of the series, you know Sunday's going to be a fight. So no matter what has happened in the past, you've still got to be focused on that next pitch.

Q. Five home runs in that third game against Georgia between Trey, Jason Walk and Dasan Harris. Trey and Walk are listed under 6-foot and Harris is listed as 6'1". What is it all about the power output from this lineup that you've seen here in Omaha? Dasan hit one to dead center, and that's just very rare in this park.

TREY GAMBILL: I think it's maturity in our preparation and our hard work. Our coaches do a great job of helping us have our best swing for these types of moments against the best pitchers. I don't think we've changed anything from our approach, to mechanics. I think just our preparation and our hard work has been paying off, and even though we are under 6-foot, Dasan's over, we're able to get good swings on and do damage.

JAXON WILLITS: I appreciate the outfielders picking us up because the infielders did not have a very good day at the plate.

Q. Their coach just said that somebody's going to have to make a play that maybe hasn't played recently to win a national championship, somebody's going to have to do something basically unexpected. Your rotation has slimmed down in Omaha. Bullpen slimmed down a little bit. The batting order has been set for a long time. Who is that going to be for you guys? Because you've got a lot of experienced players?

JAXON WILLITS: I think that's the beauty of the game of baseball is we have no idea. You have no idea. It's just one day somebody is going to get in to put into pinch run they're going to have to go steal a base or somebody's going to get put in for defense, they're going to have to go make a diving play that nobody expected. They haven't played in two or three weeks, and they're going to have to go out there and help the team win in one of the biggest spots in college baseball.

TREY GAMBILL: Yeah, like he said, it's so unexpected.

The beauty of our team is we trust every one of our guys, whether somebody goes down for an injury -- God forbid, right? But if somebody goes down for an injury or maybe a pitcher doesn't have it that day, I trust everybody that's going to come out of the that pen. I trust everybody that's on our bench to come in and contribute.

Q. Jason DeCaro, one of the most reliable starters in college baseball, what stands out about his game? What have you seen just on tape? Or is there anything specific that stands out about his pitching?

TREY GAMBILL: He's a good pitcher. And North Carolina has a reputation of great pitchers. What I've noticed he's great at pitching at both sides of the plate, up and down, great stuff. And similar to many pitchers out there in college baseball, you're going to have to be ready. You're going to have to be ready to battle. You're probably going to get two strikes, you're going to have to fight off some good pitches. That's what I see from him.

JAXON WILLITS: I mean, we had a chance to face him last year in the 1-0 game in the regional, and I feel like we kind of have a lot of guys that were here that remember what his stuff looked like. And we have a good understanding of how he liked to attack us and how he pitched us against us last year.

So we kind of just got to use that information that he showed us last year. And then some of the information that he's shown throughout this year, too, go out there and formulate a good game plan to go against him.

Q. Jaxon, I know you're locked in on the task at hand here but how cool is it to be playing baseball still in Omaha with your dad on staff ahead of Father's Day weekend in the finals?

JAXON WILLITS: I mean, it's a blessing that I'll never forget for the rest of my life. I think for everybody on our team, it's something that none of us will ever forget, and it's something that we're all looking forward to going out there and doing.

But again, we're focused on the task at hand, just trying to win the first pitch.

Q. Tremendous amount of experience for you here in Omaha. What's made this particular run and this particular trip through the tournament unique?

SKIP JOHNSON: Probably "unique" is probably not the word I'd look for, more of just different type. It's different types of players, different -- I mean, I think what is really good about our team is we have the best general manager

or whatever you call him, chief of staff, Ryan Gaines. He sets them a routine.

And it's been really a pleasure to watch our players get into that routine ever since we were in Georgia Tech. I mean, it's like clockwork to them. And I think that's really helped them get comfortable. And I said it in my first press conference, the team that gets comfortable the fastest plays better.

And I think that's not a unique thing to me. It's more of a thing that you watch as you've been here before. I mean, this is like -- I talked to a person yesterday that's been to the College World Series for softball, and it was incredible. It was our compliance officer. She goes, man, this thing's really big. I go, yeah, it's really big and it's really special. And you can't thank the NCAA and Omaha enough for what they've done to put this event on.

Q. You've talked a lot about the dugout throughout this run. The guys maybe haven't been playing as much and how they've played a big role in just kind of willing the guys on the field throughout. Has that been uncommon that you've seen this year with this particular group? And if you're able to quantify what they've been able to do, those other guys.

SKIP JOHNSON: Great question, because it's uncommon at every level. I mean, from Little League all the way up. When their kid's not playing, all they hear is the negative energy.

These guys really have been selfless. And that's probably one of the most important things, the message that I've really tried to display about this team is the selflessness that they've had in a world that's really selfish. And we're trying to teach them in our culture to be selfless, to pick each other up when something -- I mean, it's really what life's about. You think Jesus Christ was selfless? Absolutely. I mean, we live our life for that because of that reason.

So I think that's the biggest difference. Man, if you can teach those young men to be selfless in a selfish world, is really big to me. It's really big to me. When nobody cares who gets the credit, you can do amazing things. It's pretty amazing. And we're a reflection of those guys not caring.

They're pulling for those guys, the first guy on the rope, whether it's Drew Dickerson or Alec Blair or somebody like that that played early and hasn't played in a while. Some of the pitchers, yesterday, coming out of the bullpen, I saw Gavyn Jones. I said be ready, man. Bodin, be ready. He goes, I'll be ready; I'll give you everything I got.

The only thing you can ask them to do is give you effort. They can't be somebody they're not. They can just give us effort. If it's good that day, then it's good that day.

A lot of times when you get in these pressure situations, they give you too much effort. They try too hard. When you try hard in this game you fail. But if they can just be themselves, one pitch at a time, take a breath, throw the ball to the target -- because that's the only thing you can control -- or get your first step, or have the detail of reading what we need to read detail-wise on the bases or at the plate, two-strike approach, and believe in that process, the process is what matters, more so than anything.

And really proud of our kids for their dugout doing that. That's a great question. I appreciate that.

Q. You've talked a lot about the most comfortable team finds the most success here. Is there anything different about finding that comfort in the magnitude of the stage that comes with Saturday, Sunday, Monday?

SKIP JOHNSON: Not really. It's really just trying to stay in the process one pitch at a time. It's the only thing you can control. You talk about it. You try to live it. You practice it. You put it in your routines.

I mean, if you set next to our dugout, you can hear me scream, take a breath, take a breath, trying to remind them, take a breath, trying to remind they stay in the routines. All this gets exploited even more.

It's not any different game playing for the national championship or playing the first game here. It's just about trying to win pitches; swinging at strikes, not balls; trying to throw the ball to targets. It's not any different. It's just on a different stage. You just gotta look at it that way.

I mean, we all think it's different because we write about it and we're in social media, but it's really not any different. The bases are still 90-foot. You've got to run good 90s, and still 60-feet, 6-inches.

You've got to just take a breath, back the ball up to the middle, make sure you're ready to make a play, attack the play and give effort.

Q. We're at the highest stage of college baseball this year, and yet having set through mid-weeks, conference series, press conferences, the SEC Tournament, this feels like the most relaxed atmosphere here. How do you see that? How do you accomplish that with your team?

SKIP JOHNSON: I don't know if it's the most relaxed

atmosphere or not. You're at a point now where all the stuff that you practice, why do you practice? Why do you go out every day and practice in the fall and the spring? Why do you practice? To try to win the last game of the year.

Jaxon said it best the other day when we ran a pick-off, when everybody complains, but we're doing team defense and it's 111 outside. We've got to do it.

I don't think it's as much as relaxed as you may think it may be. But I'm telling you, it's a grind. It's trying to stay in those routines as much as you can. And believing those routines are very much possible and they'll help you get through times.

I had a young man named John Curtiss that played for me when I was at the University of Texas. He played his first game in the playoffs during COVID. And he actually stepped off the mound there, he would catch the ball, he would either do two arms or one arm. And he called me -- he gave up four runs against the Yankees -- and he goes, I'm tipping or something; can you look at the film or something? I go, I'll call you tomorrow.

So our video guys said video his last start. He opened the game against the Phillies, and then video, put them side by side. Well, he was only doing one arm instead of two arms. And from that point on I told him to do his two arms. And he give up one other run -- he got ambushed by Springer. And they played LA for the World Series.

So it's just about your routines, and you gotta believe in those things. And if you believe in them, you have faith in them, it will help you a lot.

Q. I mentioned Scott's comment earlier about somebody's going to have to make a play that you don't expect. And you spoke to the readiness of it -- to Josh's question, you spoke to the readiness of your guys. We were counting yesterday of practice, something like 12 or 15 guys who played regularly for you throughout the season who have not played yet here in Omaha. Can you expound on that, the readiness and who those guys are and who's going to make a play at some point.

SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, I think it's pretty cool. That's the adversity that we went through. There's a lot of guys that had to pitch. There's a lot of guys that had to play. There's some guys that were hurt. There were some guys that we had different lineups as we went through it.

I think that's really the cool thing about it. Everybody is important in that room. Everybody, they've had

experience. They've been on the field. They've had an at-bat. They've had to come in with men on. They've had to throw a breaking ball. Whatever it may be, they've experienced it in some form or fashion.

And I think they're ready for it. We'll throw them out there and see. If they're not ready for it, they're not ready for it. The sun is going to come up tomorrow. It doesn't matter, hopefully, unless Jesus Christ decides to come.

So I'm just telling you, we can't look at it like it's something so important to win a national championship. All we can do -- all we can control is what we can control. That's one pitch at a time, see the baseball, be attentive, make sure you're present, and pick each other up and pull for each other like they've never pulled for each other before.

Q. I asked this of Forbes. I asked him what does he carry with him that he remembers from '06, '07, '08, when he was here a few years ago. What do you carry with you from 2022 or when you were here with Texas? How have you evolved as you come back to Omaha?

SKIP JOHNSON: I think I'm the same guy. I mean, I still dip snuff, deer hunt, fish. I'm the same guy. I love teaching players. That's my biggest deal is the relationship with the players and the coaches. That's what I love more than anything.

We've got a different recruiting coordinator, different third base coach. Maybe that's how we evolved, I don't know. It's still the same. It's not any different. You don't all of a sudden wake up one morning and you become a different coach. I mean, you can do different things.

We still have a mental coach. We use that a lot. Our culture is just trying to get everybody to buy into your culture.

That's the similarities I see in Scott and our program. You see it and you see the players when they regurgitate what our culture's about. We have a COMPETE culture. The C stands for championship standard. The O stands for Oklahoma before you. The M stands for mentality. The P stands for process. The E stands for engage. The T stands for toughness, and the E stands for energy.

When you have a conversation with a young man, they're going to fall under one of those categories, it's really simple. When you're sitting in the back of the class acting up and you had your hat on, was that a championship standard?

When you decided to miss a signal, were you thinking about yourself or was it Oklahoma before you? So when

you make those decisions -- and when we try to live by those things. I mean it's hard to live by. It's easy for me to sit up here and talk about a lot of things, but it's hard to live by.

And those guys go through a lot of pressure every day, and we try to get out in front of it and teach them not to go through the same things we went through as coaches and try to get them through excuses. And that's our jobs as coaches, to teach them to, number one, respect baseball, respect their opponent and play hard.

And if we're not going to do that, we wouldn't be up here today. We wouldn't be playing for a national championship. I've got great coaches that do the same exact thing. And I wouldn't be -- if I couldn't do that, I wouldn't be coaching anymore.

Q. Curious, what's impressed you the most when it comes to viewing this team from your lens, enjoying the moment and the atmosphere, while still trying to focusing on the task at hand?

SKIP JOHNSON: Them having fun with each other. Them riding on each other. I think the coolest thing the other night -- I hated it -- I got away from it. And then we get home and I start watching the game, I don't get home till -- don't get to bed till like 2:30. I got away from it. I used to watch every pitch.

But at the end of the day of the game, Jason Walk, what he said, hey, I'm just trying to pass the bat off to the next guy. That's pretty cool. I mean, that's what's probably what's made me more excited than anything watching those guys pick each other up and just trying to stay in that process of doing it.

And I was really excited to see the OU family, the coaches, all the coaches come to the game. I mean, that's what Oklahoma's about. It's like a family-owned business, and it goes from our president all the way down to our board member, all the way down to our coaches and players.

And I've seen softball girls that were here. It's just awesome. It's awesome that all of the community coming together. And I can't wait -- I hope to have a caravan. You heard that song "Convoy." Maybe they've got a convoy up here. It will be awesome. Call it a convoy.

Q. Cord Rager and Xander Mercurius and Nick Wesloski and Jason DeCaro and Ryan Lynch, Folger Boaz, all six starting pitchers for both teams playing in the finals were recruited out of high school instead of the transfer portal. Are you able to draw any conclusions out of that? Is it easier to predict arms'

capability in college baseball than hitters out of high school?

SKIP JOHNSON: Not really. I look at it from the standpoint of if they fit who we are, number one, character-wise, and number two, their delivery. And if they're believers or not.

Guys that believe in themselves, it's like looking at a 200-inch deer, you are like, wow, that's a big deer. Like, wow, that guy can really pitch, because he believes in himself.

There's no magic to it. When I went and watched Brisco Smith pitch, and I walk away from there and he's a freshman, I said, this guy's going to be really good because he's a believer, he believes in himself.

Then you have your other guys that might have something wrong and you're trying to help. As a person, as the head coach, as a pitching coach, I worked just as hard as with the last guy on the team as the first guy. And sometimes they don't get it. And that's hard for me to live with sometimes. It really is. And that's what I do.

And I think if they're high school, junior college, it really doesn't matter. If they believe in themselves then they're going to be really good at what they do. And I like fixing guys, too, that are struggling. I mean, I think that's what I'm in it for, is to teach them how to get through things. I really believe that. I'm really blessed to have that.

Q. Having been to the CWS before, when you think about this team and the team previous that's made it, what are the common threads, traits within that?

SKIP JOHNSON: They play good catch. They throw strikes. They can run. And they're good teammates, and you have good coaches that make head coaches look good. I've got great coaches that make me look good. I don't have to worry about -- I can go straight to the bullpen and try to figure out how to get somebody to throw a strike. I don't have to worry about teaching the infielder.

Russel Raley's going to do that. I don't have to worry about teaching somebody to hit. Russell and Reggie's going to do that. I mean, we have great coaches and that's really the difference.

Q. With a couple of built-in off days in the College World Series schedule, what did you do yesterday and what do you plan on doing today and in the off-time, have you looked at North Carolina at all? What do you know about the Tar Heels?



SKIP JOHNSON: We did the same things over and over. That's all we did. It's no different. We didn't do anything different. We didn't have magic dust or anything like that we put on top of them. We didn't do anything different. We took batting practice, threw bullpens, listened to country music and gave high-fives and watched everybody take BP. The same thing we're going to do today. Don't do anything different.

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