

2026 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 20, 2026

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Skip Johnson

Deiten Lachance

Cord Rager

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma - 9, North Carolina - 3

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the Oklahoma Sooners, head coach Skip Johnson and student-athletes Deiten Lachance and Cord Rager.

SKIP JOHNSON: Kind of started off, the game got moved up, and you never know in this time of the year what the rain's going to do and whatnot.

But I thought we were prepared. We went out there and take the lead early. Have a couple of really good at-bats. And Deiten comes up and hits a big home run, got a lot of momentum. And Cord goes out -- and that's what the mental game of baseball is all about, exactly what happened -- he goes out. They punch back.

And what the game will tell you to do is just back away and make you feel sorry for yourself at times, get away from throwing the ball to the target at times. Just gotta stay with your routines. That's what I kept explaining to him. And use visualization to help you get through your innings, help you -- he got through that game through five innings. That's a sign of a really good pitcher. That's the sign of somebody that's got a lot of grit, a lot of guts. That helped us a ton.

Our offense exploded and took the momentum back and just never gave it back. Gavyn came in, did a great job. LJ finished it. And the man to my left was hitting balls as hard as anybody I've seen hit them in a long time.

But really proud of our team and what they did. And North Carolina's a really good team. And we picked a fight today. And they'll be ready for us tomorrow. We've just got to go out and execute pitches and do what we can to adjust

through the game.

Q. Cord, the Alabama coach said last week, last Saturday night, that he wishes he could have gotten you into more situations where you're throwing out of the stretch rather than the wind-up. He said, I think the quote was, his stuff isn't quite as dangerous out of the stretch. Did we see some of that tonight in the first inning, where you weren't really comfortable, you weren't quite -- didn't have quite the bite on the curveball, for instance, or the location on the fastball?

CORD RAGER: Yeah, I mean it was definitely not my best day on the mound. I didn't have my best stuff.

And I would disagree with that. I feel like I'm actually better out of the stretch than the wind-up because it's just more simple for me and there's less moving parts. So yeah, that's all I've got there.

Q. Deiten, I was curious if you could take us through the at-bat of your second home run. And also have you hit a home run like that? Tell us a little bit about that.

DEITEN LACHANCE: Yeah, he came to me with two heaters at the top of the zone and I couldn't get to them as well. I was just always under it and not on time. And the third one I knew he was going to come with a heater, and I told myself, I'm going to be on top of it wherever it was in the zone. And it was not in the zone but I got on top of it. I just told myself that and it worked out well, I guess.

Q. Deiten, you went out there after, I think, the fourth hit in the row to kind of calm your pitcher down. What did you say to him?

DEITEN LACHANCE: It was more of a reset. But I thought Cord was doing great. What we wanted from him was just to attack the zone. That's what he was doing. It wasn't not like he was walking the park. Like, he was going to those guys and just attack the zone.

And there's nothing more than we can ask from this guy like that. And what he did after that was just incredible. It



was more impressive than his first outing for me just to come back and give us 4-0 after that, it was awesome.

Q. Cord, strange question, maybe. Coming out of the first inning just allowing three runs, did that almost feel like a win and your comfort level going back out there in the innings to come, the final four innings for you?

CORD RAGER: Yeah, no, that didn't feel like a win at all. But I just -- you know, after the first inning, I stopped playing for myself. I just started playing for the guys around me, for the team. And I really had to try to really be a pitcher today because I didn't have my best stuff.

I just -- after the first, I just really put my head down, tried to work the process skip's always taught me and grind.

Q. Deiten, DeCaro hadn't given up more than a few runs in a game all year. You guys tagged him for seven today. Are you able to describe the level of groove you guys are in offensively for the last month?

DEITEN LACHANCE: Yeah, I mean it's at that point in the season that, I mean, they're here for a reason. North Carolina is a good team. And this guy's shown that he's a good pitcher.

But we had a good scouting report on him and we knew what he had to do with him. And we knew he was going to throw a lot of heater which you've got to be on top of them and on time.

I mean, we knew it was not going to be easy, but the guys did well. They made a good adjustment at the plate and it helped us get in the groove.

Q. Deiten, after that first four hitters all got hits, what kind of adjustments did you see out of Cord? And, Cord, just the same question, but a little bit more, what did it mean to you to be able to give some length for your team and the pitching staff?

DEITEN LACHANCE: Yeah, those two lefties are a really tough AB. I mean they're really good hitters, and they're really good two-strike hitters. What I see, they protect the plate really well. And I mean we had to just create something out of it and just try to make them chase or try to execute a pitch that they don't -- maybe not following the scouting report exactly, just trying to read them a little bit.

We have to find a way. And Cord did great. And all the other guys after that, we did great with those guys. They showed they're a good hitters all year, but at that point you've got to find a way to get those guys out.

CORD RAGER: For me, giving five innings to the team was awesome. I wish I could have stayed out there longer. I mean, I just wanted to throw my arm off for the team. Like, that's all I wanted to do. And having those four zeros after the first was awesome.

Q. Deiten, your power at the plate has really come together in the postseason. Why is it coming together so well on the biggest stage of college baseball?

DEITEN LACHANCE: I mean, I'm just trying to catch barrel at the plate right now and just help the team, just pass the baton. That's a big thing for us. I mean, it's either a 0-0 count or 0-2 count, I just gotta find a way to get on base. And if it's an error, I don't really mind. I just gotta get on first.

So it's mostly just pass the baton, and I got lucky I got a good pitch to hit and I was able to elevate them. But I mean it's just really pass the baton to the guy next to me.

Q. Jason DeCaro got to you guys early and then he got 11 0-2 and 1-2 counts. You guys were able to put up seven earned runs on him. What does that say to his lineup's ability to hit with two strikes?

DEITEN LACHANCE: I mean, the guys are just battling out there. I mean, it doesn't need to be the most pretty swing, and the guys are just going to put a ball in the play and just do the job. If there's a guy at second, they're going to put the ball on the ground, they're going to move the guy or just hit it far in the outfield.

The guys are just are trying to make a job for the team. Like it doesn't matter how we do it, if it's a bunt, hitting a ball far into the outfield, we've just gotta move the runner and bring him home. So the guys have just executed really well, no matter what the count is. And they don't give up easy.

Q. Talking about the guys that came in behind Cord, kind of continuing that process. I think they had just two hits over the final four innings, if that. Talk to me about Gavyn Jones, who hadn't pitched since the Georgia Tech game on the 31st of May, so that's almost three weeks or at three weeks, and then obviously LJ coming in behind him, the decision to go with LJ there?

SKIP JOHNSON: Well, I mean when you're a reliever that's kind of what you do. We still go out and throw bullpens and do whatnot.

But it's just really picking each other up. I mean that's a big

thing, is they pick each other up. And they care so much.

I mean you heard Cord say it, I mean it's a selfless thought. I wanted to pitch, throw my arm out for our team. I mean, he's really good and he's a freshman. I hope he don't throw his arm out for his team, but I've got to get in the way of that. But it just shows what he's about.

And, I mean, Gavyn Jones, is a guy that's got great stuff. I mean really good stuff. He's been a selfless kid all year long, coming out of the bullpen, when he probably could go to a lot of places and start.

But I think that's what they're going to use him as in professional baseball. I mean, the guy's been up to 99 miles an hour this past spring. And he's evolving as a pitcher. He came in as a hitter and a pitcher. And he's evolving now as he's learning how to pitch.

He learned a breaking ball this spring early, and he's gotten better and better. And it was this true confidence is starting to come out a little bit. And I was really proud of him just to attack the strike zone.

Q. Talk about the two-out hitting. Kyle Branch, first hit kind of opening the floodgates there in the fourth inning?

SKIP JOHNSON: I thought there was huge. It was really what I said up here and preach about, being selfless and they're talking about passing the baton.

Deiten, I don't know if the ball is in or out. It didn't matter. He had a good quality at-bat. I think sixth or seventh pitch at-bat. He grinded out, and the guy made a hell of a pitch on the ball in on him.

And Kyle picked him up. I mean he went one or two strikes and then barreled the ball right back up the middle, really, after he hit a two-iron to left field. It was really huge for us at the time. It gave us momentum and kind of -- we kept sustaining, the momentum was huge. I thought it was probably one of the biggest hits of all day long.

Q. What kind of X factor, in your mind, was the base running today? You had a bunch of steals. You guys obviously always play like that, but in the past sometimes it's hurt you. Today it was obviously huge.

SKIP JOHNSON: I can't even describe how happy I am for Russell Raley and Reggie Willits and how they've really communicated with the hitters and communicated the base running, the details that happen in that. They were huge.

I mean, it puts more pressure on them to try to make

pitches. It got us in scoring position. It was really big. I thought it was big. It kept the momentum.

It was like, wow, I'm sitting there watching it, it's pretty cool. The one time -- the bunt that Kyle got down was big. And it was huge. I mean, I agree 100 percent with you.

Q. Looking into tomorrow, I assume Xander is getting the starting nod on the mound? What's the game plan look like? And will he have a short leash if stuff goes wrong?

SKIP JOHNSON: Well, yeah, he'll pitch tomorrow. I mean, I talked to him a little bit today. He felt good, which was good. I'll talk to him again. And we'll decide that tonight, if he'll pitch tomorrow.

The game plan is -- go out there and throw strikes. I don't have a joystick or some magic dust I throw on top of him, and all of a sudden this guy becomes Marcus Stroman or somebody like that.

He'll compete. That's the thing you can ask him to do. He'll give you everything he's got. Every one of those kids are giving you everything they've got. And they play with passion.

And you want to drive hours to watch them play because they play with -- you feel what they feel when they play. That's what you feel when you watch them.

If we win or lose this whole thing, it doesn't matter to me, man, as long as they continue to do what they do, I mean, the rest of their lives because that's really what it's about -- being selfless, helping each other. That's our job as coaches is to teach them that. And it's been really fun to watch that.

And they play with so much passion. I always talk about David Allan Coe, "The Ride" -- can you make people cry when you play and sing? Or you go to church, you can feel the presence of God in there. When they're playing, man, you can feel that. And when they're getting after it, you can feel it. And it's a beautiful thing.

Q. Had a question about Deiten, how he's hit this year. I think ESPN showed a graphic that he didn't have a home run through the first pretty much half of the season and then he's had this just kind of explosion of power in the second half. What have you seen from him? Has it been adjustments at the plate? Have things just started to click? Then you said that he was hitting balls today as hard as you've seen anybody hit them before. What did you see from him today as well?



SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean he's a good player. He played for my son at McLennan Junior College, Tyler Johnson, and he's a baseball player. That's what he is. He's had to make adjustments, and that's what he does. He's a baseball player, and a baseball player will make adjustments and they'll figure it out, and that's what he's done.

You get to see his raw emotion every day. I don't know if he ever has a bad day, man. He's always happy. He's always keeping everybody up. He's a breath of fresh air. I get emotional talking about him because he's really good. I mean, really good. He's a good player, and he's a good team leader, and I mean those kids in the middle of the field are incredible.

Q. Nobody knows Cord's stuff better than you. And I just wanted to get your take on what Rob said last week and what Scott said today, is that, yeah, that's part of the scouting report on Cord, is try to get him in the stretch. And kind of how he bounced back from that first inning. He talked about it, but how he bounced back, what did you think of the way he was able to -- I think he retired 10 of the last 13 hitters?

SKIP JOHNSON: Yeah, for him, stretch is probably better for him. Like he said, it makes him more simpler. Actually makes him more athletic, which is really good.

Anytime you get anybody out of the stretch, they're going to feel uncomfortable. Why is that? Because there's men on base, you know? So that's why people get uncomfortable. You get them on. That's why they get uncomfortable. If you can find a guy that can pitch with men on, you better sign him, because he's going to be really good. And there's guys like that in professional baseball. And there's guys like that in college.

We go out and we go recruiting and we see a young man that can pitch when there's runners on, we usually try to sign him because he's got a low pulse and he can make adjustments through the game.

But I think the biggest thing for me is Cord, what he did today, was show you what his true grit is as a pitcher and his level of care for his teammates.

Q. Your approach with being one game away from winning a national championship, does that change at all? Does this group need a talking to? The numbers say it's a huge advantage, but there's also a lot of pressure that comes with that, potentially?

SKIP JOHNSON: I'm just going to stay out of their way. I

don't know any other way to do it. You think we're going to go out and hit tonight and take 100 ground balls somewhere? We're not going to do that. I can promise you that. Just stay out of their way.

It's in God's plan. It's not mine. You ask every one of those players, they'll tell you exactly the same thing, it's God's plan, it's not mine.

And I'm just proud of those guys for being selfless. It doesn't matter to me. I mean, it really doesn't. I'm just proud of those players and proud that I'm at a university that cares a lot. That's what I'm proud of.

Q. You mentioned the changed start time. You've had multiple days off couple times here in a row. You've been on the road for more than a month. What's given you the confidence every day when you wake up that it's going to be that same team that stays hot and stays in a rhythm the way you have through the postseason?

SKIP JOHNSON: Prayer, number one. Number two, they stick with their routines. Number three, our chief of staff and our deputy director are really good at setting schedules to keep them in those routines. It's not just me, it's a team that's put together, a well thought of team that's put together. Whether it's the schedule, whether it's dinner, whether it's anything, it's a well-thought-out deal. And I'm really thankful to have these people around me because they make me look good, and I'm just an old baseball coach.

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