

College World Series: Baton Rouge Regional

Sunday, June 1, 2025

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Little Rock Trojans Coach Chris Curry Gage Haley Postgame Press Conference

Little Rock 8, Dallas Baptist 6

CHRIS CURRY: I was thinking in the ninth inning how we were percentage points away from not making our conference tournament, which would have broke a streak for us as a program because we always at a minimum make the tournament, and that's important to us and a team goal.

Then we get in the tournament, get hot, and the Baton Rouge Regional pops up on ESPN, and we celebrate because we just wanted an opportunity to play on one of the biggest stages in college baseball. And then ran into a good team Game No. 1 and then won -- first game, which hasn't been done in program history.

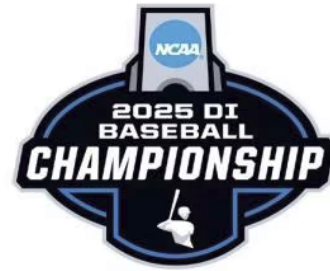
And then to beat a Dallas Baptist team -- Dan Heefner is one of my role models in college baseball coaching. First of all, he's a great man of faith, he runs a class-act program. He is a hitting guru. It's a top-25 Omaha caliber club.

Once again, for the Little Rock Trojans to step on the field and compete at the highest level and compete on potentially what could have been the last game of the year for us and get a win against such an unbelievable club just speaks volumes.

I went to bed last night knowing that Gage was going to start. I did not want to tell him, but I did text his parents -- you don't know that -- and make sure that they would be here. Get on the elevator on Floor No. 5 and there was a big 6'6" pitcher standing in front of me, can't make it up. I said, Gage, how's your morning going?

He smiled, said, Good, Coach.

I said, Good, you're starting today.



Oh, okay.

That's about how he said it.

Gage is a Mississippi State transfer that came to us last year, and what a wonderful family. Pitched in the biggest game in Little Rock Trojan program history, up until 8:00 tonight, and then that'll be the biggest one. But we're going to enjoy this one for a couple of minutes.

Q. Gage, I guess we just heard Coach tell the story, but walk me through you learning that you were going to be starting today. What was your instant reaction and how ready for you for today?

GAGE HALEY: I went to bed last night preparing to start because I knew it was between me and a couple other pitchers. Got in the elevator this morning and was with Coach Curry and his family, and he said, Gage, you're starting.

And I was ready to go. That's about it. Got locked in, had a good breakfast, and got to the field and was ready to go.

Q. Gage, what is your mindset going into the game? I'm sure you're thinking you've got to do the job for your team, hold them down. How did you prepare mentally for this start?

GAGE HALEY: I was sitting watching BP and just thinking about the job that I needed to do. And our offense since the conference tournament started has been on fire, so I knew that if I just ate up innings, threw a lot of strikes, let the defense work and let them play behind me, I knew that my offense would score runs. And that was the mindset going into there.

I knew I needed to locate with my fastball and then off speed get it out of the zone. Went in there, let my defense work and got the job done.

Q. Gage, you talked about knowing that the offense would score runs. You hang up a 0 in the top half of the first and they go and get you a 3-spot in the bottom of the first half. How good is that for you coming out



knowing those guys have got your back not only on defense but in the batter's box?

GAGE HALEY: Oh, it gave me a lot of confidence. As soon as they put the 3-spot up, I was like, yeah, we've got a shot. I have just got to go out there, throw a lot of strikes, let my defense work, get back in the dugout, and let them swing some more. And that was the goal.

CHRIS CURRY: I know we're going to get around to it, but the job that Zack Busick did out of the bullpen. He hasn't thrown since the C Mo series in what is his best outing. He'll tell you that. Did not throw in the tournament.

But his freshman year he was in the weekend rotation. We knew he had the stuff to go out there and do what he did. I would just like to compliment him. We never gave up on him, and he did a wonderful job.

Q. Gage, can you take us inside the locker room and the general feeling amongst you guys right now, how dangerous you feel like you are here?

GAGE HALEY: Yeah, we have all the confidence in the world right now. It feels like we aren't missing any mistake that the pitchers throw when our team is in the box. And the pitches that have gone out there, they're doing their job, filling up the zone, and getting the job done. We're comfortable, we're relaxed, and we have a lot of confidence right now.

Q. What does it mean to you on a personal level that Coach trusts to put you in in this kind of situation?

GAGE HALEY: It means the world to me. I was so pumped. I was so thankful for the opportunity that he gave me. And it was -- this opportunity is the biggest spot that I've thrown in in my career. So it means a lot for him to trust me to go out there and do my thing.

Q. Coach, heading into an elimination game, what's your message to the team today? This could be it, but what do you say to the team to get the morale up?

CHRIS CURRY: We've been living with that feeling of that wolf chasing us right behind us for weeks now. We're numb to it. These guys aren't afraid with everything on the line. You saw the way we played today. We tried some different things. Small ball, a little bit of some baserunning creativity out there. Four home runs, I think it was.

That is the hallmark and just the epitome of a team that's playing fearless. And we are going to make some mistakes. There are going to be some moments where it doesn't go our way. But as we said in the dugout, scared

money doesn't make money. So if we sit back on our heels and just try to play for a 3-run homer -- which we can do. We're going to attack the game within reason. Not going to be reckless. We're going to play some percentages and things.

But I think, especially the bigger the moment, if you can pressure the other team instead of waiting for something to happen, that's to your advantage, the element of surprise a little bit.

Q. Speaking of home runs, Coach, when did y'all become a home run hitting team? I feel like that hasn't been the case all year.

CHRIS CURRY: I guess since we got to Alex Box. This is a home run ballpark. And that's not an insult, it's just LSU baseball is known for home runs, so when in Rome, right?

No, the wind flipped around a little bit today. The very first night it was blowing straight in, and that benefitted us on some swings the first night against LSU. We know that. But it kind of turned around.

Worry is not the word, but I was a little concerned about the DBU offense, and they've got a couple of big-time hitters over there, that it would be an offensive home run fest, especially late in the tournament.

We're running out of arms. They're running out of arms, DBU. And maybe they're not running out of arms because Peters they brought in was 93, 95 with two breaking balls. Someone said that was one of their main weekend arms.

I want to have a dynamic offense always. I want to be able to score in a variety of different ways, and that's how we're going to build our offense. That's how we coach it. We pride ourselves on baserunning. We pride ourselves being able to manipulate the barrel at different times. And you saw that.

When they brought in velocity, our approach was to get on top of it, not go to effort, swing easy, and let his power do the work. When it was a different approach, we tried to stay on our legs and drive the ball around the yard. We benefitted from the home run. Ty Rhoades early, I think he hit a low changeup. And you'll have to help me remember, but Zach Henry hit an opposite field home run.

Then Reed Willbanks, somebody look it up, is that his first one, maybe his second one? There's one more in there. Angel Cano, what can I say about that guy? And how fitting is it that the last two outs of the game ended in Angel Cano's glove after we had just told him to scoot over tight to the line in no double situation so the ball didn't get down

the line on us.

Let me credit DBU. I've never had the opportunity to compete against them, and I've always admired them from afar. And to be able to not only compete and stay with them but come out with the win, that's a proud moment for me as a coach and a program.

Q. I know you said what else can you say about him, but Angel has had a heck of a regional, both yesterday and today. Talk about the work that he's put in to get to this spot and to be playing so well, not only in the batter's box but on defense, as well.

CHRIS CURRY: Yeah, and if I can tell Angel's -- a little more of a story, we touched on it last night, but this is my understanding. From Colombia originally, and went to I think one of the baseball academies there, and at 14 or 15 was very close to being signed professionally. Had an injury the day before and did not get to sign.

Had another situation where he was playing as a high schooler and was very close to being drafted, had an injury.

Had to come over here in the States and play junior college baseball. Signed with another Power Four program, dives for a ball in the 4 hole, injury, shoulder. Not able to go to that program.

But I believe God has a plan for everybody and a purpose. Angel is a strong man of faith, as well. He's said that many times. He committed -- basically the night that we called him when Coach Parker got the job and he knew with him, and we talked through the situation and what we had to offer and what we were looking for.

And Angel is extremely intelligent. He's one of -- so when you sign or commit these guys, there's a whole 'nother process of application to school, housing, paperwork. Angel Cano might be the best player I've ever had at getting his paperwork turned in and done. But that just shows his attention to detail, more importantly his desire to play. And he's had so many opportunities pulled away from him, but I believe it's all for this moment right here.

He's healthy now. He's healthy now. He had a shoulder, and then Ty Rhoades ran into his left elbow on a bunt play in inter-squads, and hurt it pretty bad. And it's just -- thank goodness he's getting healthy because that's the guy that we knew we had.

Q. Chris, I know you have another game to play so you don't want to dwell too much on things, on achievements, but still, you won your first NCAA

Tournament game in program history yesterday. Now obviously in your first regional final. Do you have any thoughts about what you've accomplished to this point?

CHRIS CURRY: I haven't allowed myself to stop and grasp the magnitude of it because I'm still in game mode, and I have a job to do, and I have another game to manage. I won't say coach because the coaching is done. The hay is in the barn. They know what to do. They just need information, and it's our job to put them in the right spot.

Every now and then, I'll take a glance up in the stands at my family, all the fans that are here from Little Rock, our administration who has our back. A famous coach said, coaches and players win ballgames, but administrations win championships. You've got to have the backing and the support.

I know where we're headed with our new athletic director Frank Cuervo and what he wants to do and what I want to do, and our visions are aligned. And this is just the beginning. We're trying to enjoy the moment, but I just know that Little Rock baseball has so many more fun days ahead, starting tonight at 8:06 with 11, 12, 13,000 great baseball fans that are going to make a fun environment for the kids that are wearing Little Rock across their chest to compete in.

We're just thankful for the opportunity, but we are not intimidated by the opportunity whatsoever.

Q. Coach, obviously another matchup with LSU later tonight. What can you take from the first matchup that you can use to get a different result this evening?

CHRIS CURRY: Thankfully, Eyanson and Anderson are burned for the weekend. Those are major leaguers.

No, I know the pitching staff for LSU is one of the finest in the country. I am well aware of the caliber of arms we're going to see. I was able to come back to the game last night and watch. I had a very cool moment where as Nicole from the NCAA was taking Caleb and I, my son, to our seat, I looked to the right and Coach Bertman was sitting there. So I got an opportunity to reconnect with him.

He had recruited me just a little bit out of Meridian Junior College in Mississippi. They had Brad Cresse, pretty good player, so I elected to go to Mississippi State. But just knowing what a great job and how well coached they are by Jay Johnson and his staff. I got to watch them play last night. They're dynamic. See them up close, power.



But right now the way that it's going for us, it would not matter who we play. We're just embracing the moment and happy to be on this stage. And there's no finer moment as a coach to know that you are writing out a lineup for a team that's going to do what you ask them to do, attack the moment and be aggressive, and I know that our guys will from Little Rock.

Q. At this stage of the tournament everyone is kind of fighting, not having arms in the bullpen. You threw out a few guys who haven't seen a ton of action this year. To see them stand up, how impressed were you by that, and also, where do you stand going into tonight?

CHRIS CURRY: Very impressed. I told them before we started tournament play in the OVC that somebody not named Jackson Wells or Jack Klein or Van Cleve -- who was outstanding to come in and get a strikeout of Krauss, their best guy in the lineup -- somebody new -- there's going to be a new hero. There has to be a new hero in the postseason.

Today it was Haley and Busick on the mound. I don't know who we're going to go with first. I thought about talking to my friend Ben McDonald, seeing if he had a year of eligibility left, but probably not, so we're going to have to go and pitch somebody else.

I asked Gage, give me four outs. Four outs. I was communicating with an old coach, Jim Case, and he said, just ask for four outs, and any out past that is a plus. So whoever we hand the ball to first, we'll ask them to get four outs, and then we'll keep moving out by out, and we've got to get 27. That's the approach that we'll take.

The offense can't play soon enough. When you've got a hot offense, you want to keep playing.

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