

College World Series: Baton Rouge Regional

Tuesday, June 3, 2025

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

LSU Tigers

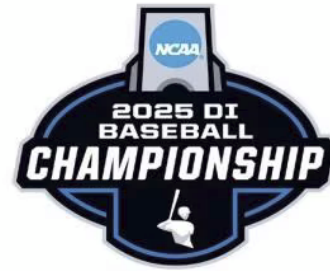
Coach Jay Johnson

Casan Evans

Ethan Frey

Luis Hernandez

Postgame Press Conference



better performances on that pitching mound in championship games than what you saw from Casan.

Super proud of these guys, couldn't be more excited to dive into Super Regional week and get ready for West Virginia.

Q. Casan, I imagine performances and nights like this are why you want to come to a place like this. Just talk about your performance out there tonight and just how big of a confidence boost, I guess, this gives you now as you go forward into your LSU career knowing you can do this on the biggest stage?

CASAN EVANS: Yeah, I mean, hands down one of the best performances I've had of this year and of my career. So I couldn't be more thankful for Coach Johnson trusting me in the situation when we were down a couple runs. He threw me in with runners on. I was just going to go right at them and let them get themselves out.

And having these two behind me, especially Luis at the plate, being able to calm me down in certain situations, I mean, it was awesome.

Also you have our fan base, and there's no better fan base in the country.

Q. Casan, your ability to work fast, obviously you were feeling it, and your ability to kind of play at your pace, how important was that to your success tonight?

CASAN EVANS: I think tempo is the best thing you can have when you're on the mound. It's one of the big factors that a lot of pitchers don't have. When you don't have tempo, you won't be able to get dudes out.

I think at one point in the game I got a little too fast, Kade Anderson came up to me said you threw four pitches in 20 seconds. That was a little too fast, but I was able to go out there and get within myself and compete.

Q. For a kid from a small Louisiana town, you needed somebody to break down the door because you were getting runners on base. What was it like to clear the

LSU - 10, Little Rock - 6

JAY JOHNSON: First, I just want to say congratulations to Coach Curry and Little Rock. Tremendous run here these last couple of weeks. Massive hat tip, massive respect. Absolutely took us to the mat. I don't know if I've seen a better prepared or competitive or well-coached team at any point.

I've told the players tonight is one of the best wins of my entire career because of what they had to do to earn it. We obviously have great talent and great players like these three guys, but you're looking at three of the best human beings on the planet.

We won tonight because of character. And when I think about character, I think about Luis and I think about Ethan and I think about Casan.

I've said this before maybe in reference to them, but this is what an LSU baseball player is supposed to be and needs to be in all phases.

You look at the offensive performance by Ethan, that's arguably the best game I've ever seen any one of my players ever play, considering the situation.

Luis, clutch. I mean, absolutely clutch. Sometimes you look a player in the eye in the on-deck circle and you think this is about to be good. Special night tonight, toughness, catching four games in a row. Proud of him for that. Maintaining massive offensive production.

This dude is a superstar, and you guys have been around a lot longer than I have, but there haven't been very many



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bases with your hit and how the crowd never seemed to give up on you?

ETHAN FREY: Coach Johnson talks a lot about controlling the situation, not letting the moment get too big. When you're actually able to do it, shows how much trust he has in you and your ability to compete and play no matter what the situation is. Like Casan said, we have the best fan base in the country playing at home. It's an advantage, whether people want to admit it or not, but it's unbelievable.

Q. Luis, just talk a little bit about the work defensively, like Jay said, the incredible toughness catching four games in a row. Talk about your work, calming the pitchers down, managing games like that, as well as having a great day at the plate. How do you manage that as a player?

LUIS HERNANDEZ: First of all, I want to thank God that's blessed me that I have health. Thank you to Jay Johnson that we work in the fall really hard to accomplish this and my ability to be great in catching and Bailey and Eyanson help me in my situation and all that and thanks to them.

Q. Casan, from a command perspective, do you feel you had better sense, better control tonight keeping the ball down? How big of a key was that for you?

CASAN EVANS: That was the biggest thing going into the game. I talked with Coach Yeskie before, and he was like as long as you keep the ball down in the zone, throw your off speed, you'll get batters out real easily.

I think what he said was true. When I got the ball down, they got themselves out, and that's pretty much how the game went. When it was up, then they got a hit or it wasn't in the zone. I think keeping the ball down in the zone really helped us out tonight.

Q. Casan and Luis, Casan, did you ever strike out nine in a row in Little League ball or anything like that that you can recall? And, Luis, was anybody calling you Big Papi in the dugout after you hit those home runs?

CASAN EVANS: I can remember back in high school when I did it, but other than that I haven't done it since. So tonight was really special. I couldn't have done it without Luis.

LUIS HERNANDEZ: I mean, Casan is amazing. I told him, like, I got you. You can throw breaking ball in the dirt, I'm going to try to do my best to block the ball. I said let's win.

Q. Ethan, Casan comes in, he's pitching the way he is.

How much did he change attitude, energy in the dugout in between innings while you guys were on the field -- although there were somewhere you didn't have to do anything because he's striking everybody out. How much did he, quote/unquote, change this game tonight?

ETHAN FREY: When he comes in and minimizes the damage and competes out there from the start, especially as a freshman in a postseason game, it's huge. Gave our offense a chance. Being a teammate seeing that, I want to push harder on top of what I've already done for the day.

But it was unreal. He completely changed the game for us, gave us a chance when we were down big early. Couldn't be more proud of him, watching him come a long way and competing this entire time.

Q. Ethan, this week last year you had the surgery, or thereabouts. How rewarding is a performance and a win like this when you consider the rehab process you had and everything you went through through those eight months or so leading to today?

ETHAN FREY: Sweetest thing I've ever had in my life. A lot of challenging times and moments those rehab moments were. But the trust Coach Johnson had in me and my other teammates supporting me throughout the entire time means a lot when we compete like we did tonight. Some teams probably would have thought they were out of the game, but we weren't done. I'm looking forward to continue to play at Alex Box.

Q. To build on that, Luis and Ethan jump on you guys 5-1 there in the second inning, some teams could wither in those situations or lose a little bit of focus. Any conversations in the dugout how to get back on track? Scored five in the last innings to put them away. Any conversations about that?

LUIS HERNANDEZ: We always are competing in the box and pitch by pitch, and we have the talent and we have to compete in the play.

ETHAN FREY: Like Luis just said, knowing there's plenty of game left. You can't compete, can't throw in the flag, can't start taking any at-bats. You have to start competing with the team, passing the baton like we said many times. But being a part of it and seeing us do it is very special.

Q. You guys talk about the fan support and everything you get. But there was a lot of nervousness in the ballpark, especially when you guys got down 5-1. Did you ever allow yourself to be concerned about not winning, or are you just from last night to tonight just



trying to figure out all the things that it would take to win?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, the first thing I want to say is I want to echo what the players said about that environment tonight was special. Like, maybe the Super Regional a couple years ago. I don't ever remember it like that. It's been great.

That was like another bar. And the thing I'm the most grateful for is maybe in those nervous moments for them, I felt like they really lifted the team. I think Jake flied out to left with the bases loaded. A little bit of carry-over feeling maybe for them with last night's game. Not capitalizing on some opportunities, but they kept going, they kept supporting the players, and that's all I care about.

Baseball is not a game to be played -- designed to be played perfectly all the time, and the fans here, they love LSU no matter what. But this is the easiest group of guys to get behind in the entire world because you have Casan Evans, Ethan Frey, Luis Hernandez, and that's the character of the team.

But the fans were outstanding tonight.

Q. Looking around the nation at other Regionals, you could not ignore top seeds falling. Did you guys at any point today coming into this game feel like your backs were against the wall? If so, what did you tell your team to try to get them to relax?

JAY JOHNSON: I didn't watch any games today. I literally did not turn the TV on in my office. I have no idea who won, who lost, any of that type of stuff, by design.

And the approach today was a little bit different. I actually brought something back from my past I did at Arizona when we would host and play really late games. I actually brought them in early in the day as kind of like, hey, this is a checkpoint type deal.

And they didn't need any motivation today. It was actually pretty cool. Actually just wrote on the board the lineup. I wanted everybody to know the lineup early. I wanted everybody to know the pitching plan. And the guys on the bench, next to each name I wrote down what their job was tonight. It was pretty cool to actually see the game play out the way it did.

It's as simple as Ashton Larson, you're going to pinch-hit it when there's runners on base. There was two outs, man on first, and he drew a walk, which set the table for the big hit of the night, Ethan's double with bases loaded.

Jake Brown advancing on the ball in the dirt, which we were going to anticipate because Jared was hitting behind them, they were going to try to do sliders down, advanced on the ball in the dirt, ended up scoring a huge run right there.

Obviously Casan's performance speaks for itself, and the thought was they would not be able to adjust to his tempo and aggressiveness following Zac.

It was really cool. It was really just about all we talk about is how we play. And this is about execution. It's really boring for you guys. You can't write a story on execution. But that's all the game was about. We felt like we had a good plan, and I'm proud of them for going out and executing it tonight.

Q. When you say that, it reminds me of what you did in Omaha with your pitching plan. How much in advance did you have Anthony in the hole? And speak to the job that he and Casan did to bring this thing home.

JAY JOHNSON: Add that guy to everything I've said about these guys. Absolute warrior. I told him last Wednesday he was going to pitch on Friday. And the reason, the main reason we were going to use him on Friday was because I felt he would be able to bounce back for the exact scenario tonight.

I kind of looked at him when things weren't going well last night in the ninth inning, down 10-4, it was: I got it. That was it. He went down there mid game, basically, when we got it back to 5-4.

And he doesn't take very long to get ready. The dude's like ridiculous athlete, ridiculous physical condition. And the competitors like -- even when they rolled the ball up the middle for the base hit and it's 7-6, my heartbeat didn't change because of the man on the mound.

He was ready for it. This was also why we did what we did at Hoover. I didn't want that to be the first time that he did it.

Q. Sometimes when things have gone sideways in games, you decided to have a little team meeting in the dugout, but down 5-1 in this situation, you decide not to do that. Why did you decide not to do that?

JAY JOHNSON: That's a good question. And I'm really excited to answer this, and I mention this being one of the best wins I've ever had. To a man, they were not going to let each other lose tonight. It was like next level like conversations of staying with it and enthusiasm, let's

answer back, cut into the lead, three quality at-bats in a row. Get the lead-off guy on.

And that's why it was such a great win. They were not going to let each other lose tonight. In a way that you don't see very often. But you guys have seen it. I mean, you've seen it. You saw it against Mississippi State. You saw it against Alabama and Tennessee. They fully believed they could do it. I'm even more proud because we had a couple of opportunities that didn't come through early. Like it didn't come easily.

It's a great win, and I just felt good about where they were at mentally. There was no panic. The one time when I went out to the mound for the second time in the inning, it was like, hey, we made an error. I can't remember the last time we made an error in the infield. I really can't.

And the ball fell in between Chris and Danny. And then maybe I felt the sense of the nerves in the ballpark. I was like, okay, let's get out of this at 5-1, and then number 20 took care of the rest from there.

Q. I don't know if I've ever seen you as animated as you were after the Jared Jones home run there in the dugout. How important was that swing, one? And then how important is it for him going through struggles at the plate?

JAY JOHNSON: That's probably the most excited I've been at least in this season. He hit a big homer as a freshman against Alabama in a crazy game we had kind of come back in like that.

So I just love him. I mean, this is three years, and this is like this as far as what we're trying to do in player development.

He hasn't had a good couple weeks here, but we were here working today. And there was just like one of those good coaching moments where somebody, you can tell how hard they're fighting themselves because they care so much and they want to be the guy for the team. It wasn't about him or his performance; he's way past that.

He's been such a great leader this year. And just the work that was put in today mentally and physically, two hits, I think he had two hits. That was a huge deal. It's a lot different 9-6 than 7-6, as we know from Chapel Hill last year. That's why we didn't win the Regional last year because we couldn't get the two-run cushion.

So the moment, the work, the behind the scenes, the blood, sweat and tears in the bucket that he's put in that nobody sees; they just see the struggle. It was really cool

-- it was a really cool moment right there on top of just winning. It was the winning play of the game.

Q. You moved a lot of pieces around in the lineup from last night. It's hard to do, I imagine, in this point of the season when you had this successful season. Could you talk about some of those decisions and maybe how long it took you to decide to do that or maybe how short a time it took you?

JAY JOHNSON: I think I just operate this, when do you take a risk? You take a risk when you have a lot to gain. We had a chance to play a Super Regional at home, two wins to go to Omaha. Seven more to win a national championship, maybe eight.

It was time to take a risk, and then you don't just do it to do it. There's never a decision in this program made just because I want to make a decision. I walk you through the whole thing.

So Derek Curiel is the engine of this offense. That's what he is. He's the engine of this offense and how he plays inspires the team.

And then it's Ethan Frey is one of the best hitters in the country right now. Right now he's one of the best hitters in the country. I wanted to get him up as much as we possibly could.

I wanted them to feel pressure immediately in the game with him stepping in the batter's box. Steven, I don't know if he was on the All-Tournament team -- yeah, I see it right there. His at-bats this weekend were him at his best as a player. He'll play baseball a long time if he takes the caliber of at-bats that he has.

I felt good going into the day, like that's what he was going to do. Danny hit two homers and then hit a deep fly ball against them the other night, and how they pitched him, I knew they were viewing him as a big threat. I thought that would help Steven get pitches to hit.

Jake, I thought, was a good match-up being that we were going to see the types of pitchers we saw tonight. And then on the best teams that I've had, that six-hole guy, after you're having to work through the top five and all those guys doing their jobs, sometimes they can get forgotten about a little bit or the pitcher lets up just a little bit. I wanted to give Jared that advantage.

Chris Stanfield, I thought, played awesome this weekend. I wanted to get him up a couple more times. Done a great job turning the lineup over, but I thought maybe getting him one more at-bat in the ninth inning, he hit the chopper and

the speed obviously created a run.

I told the team, that was the best eight-hole hitter in the country tonight in Luis. That was also on the board, actually. And then Michael just played defense because with Zac and Casan, there was a sense the ball was going to be on the ground and run tough at-bats and turn the lineup over. And I just felt like I liked the flow of all of it a lot better.

Q. Obviously Ashton Larson gets the initial pinch-hit but then you put in Tanner Reeves at third base; he puts up some good ABs and does some good work defensively. Talk about what he means as far as Super Regionals and beyond that.

JAY JOHNSON: He's a very good player. We had him committed for a long time. I like left-handed hitters. He is obviously a lot stronger than he looks, as you saw the ball come off the bat tonight. He works really hard.

He played great defense in a couple of games we had him in this weekend as well. We'll take it game by game and just another guy that belongs here. When I think about these guys, these are supremely talented players, but it's probably a lot like Coach Bertman had when they were rolling here in terms of the competitor, the worker, and then there's always a Tanner Reeves on one of those teams, too, that steps up when you really need him. He stepped up big tonight.

That play in the eighth inning was huge to arm strength that thing over there. He took a couple of really good swings, too.

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