

College World Series: Lexington Regional

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Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Ball State Cardinals

Coach Rich Maloney

Trennor O'Donnell

Adam Tellier

Press Conference



Kentucky - 4, Ball State - 0

COACH MALONEY: Today, I think our kids battled. It was a great ball game. And early in the game we had some opportunities. We had that nice lineout in the first inning. We executed a perfect hit and run, and the lineout obviously was our biggest chance.

Who would have thunk it in the first inning to have your big opportunity? And it was right at the second baseman.

And I thought we strung along good at-bats early in the game. And then when they brought in their relief pitcher I thought he was outstanding, really stymied us.

But I've got to tip my hat off to Trennor right here because he pitched -- this is two games in a row where we had to have him pitch outstanding to give our team a chance, both in the Mid-American Conference and in this game.

And his bar raised. He raised the bar. He was outstanding. He kept Kentucky off balance all day long, a really good Kentucky team, and proud of Trennor for that. I'm proud of my guys.

Q. Adam, what was Mason, their reliever, doing that was so effective against you guys?

ADAM TELLIER: I think working down well in the zone. He was throwing sinkers that were right at the bottom of the zone and getting us to roll over some pitches we thought we were hitting pretty well.

We definitely hit some balls hard in play and just got nothing for it, honestly. Right at everyone all day.

And we thought we put together good at-bats, like Coach

said. But he did a good job of staying down in the zone and not letting us get very good barrels.

Q. Trennor, what kind of challenges does Kentucky's lineup pose? And how were you able to (indiscernible)?

TRENNOR O'DONNELL: I think their whole lineup is just really, I would say, disciplined. They're not chasing after non-competitive pitches. And I think that was the biggest challenge for me. A lot of guys just making good contact.

And I was making quality pitches, and I think the big deal for Kentucky was just they're competing and they're just going to grind out at-bats.

Q. Trennor, Kentucky's offensive identity is a lot of small ball, moving the baseball, a lot of hit and runs. You guys did a great job controlling the running game. Was that a consciousness every time going into the day?

TRENNOR O'DONNELL: Yes, absolutely. We put in a lot of work holding guys on and just making sure they're not going to take extra bases on us without a challenge.

That was a big emphasis in practice going into the weekend. And, yeah, small-ball team, and just really good at-bats. And I think the main thing for them is just they're going to go up there and try to get guys on and move runners however they can.

Q. Trennor, summer finally arrived here. Maybe the hottest day you've pitched this season. I imagine 119 pitches. Did you like throwing in the heat today?

TRENNOR O'DONNELL: I mean, I like the heat. I'm from Texas. So I'm kind of used to it. And kind of reminds me of the long summer seasons at home. So it was a lot of fun.

And just getting out there with my guys and being able to compete and having a little heat with it was a lot of fun.

Q. Did you still have a little gas in the tank when you



came out? Where were you at when you got pulled?

TRENNOR O'DONNELL: I think I had some left. But I think it was probably the right decision to take me out. We gotta trust the rest of our guys. And I always believe in myself and think that I can get the job done, but I want to do whatever is best for the team.

And that's our motto is the team, the team, the team. So, whatever we can do to win games is how we're going to do it.

Q. Kentucky has waited a while to kind of unveil the ballpark. What did you think of the ballpark itself?

TRENNOR O'DONNELL: I thought it was awesome. It was a lot of fun. The atmosphere was just electric. And I didn't like that I gave up the home run and everyone went crazy, but I could feel the crowd shaking a little bit. And it was just a lot of fun. I think that was probably the biggest atmosphere I've ever thrown in. It was a great experience and a lot of fun, and coming out and competing just soaking it in is just a great experience.

Q. A lot of effort went in this week controlling the running game and kind of taking that aspect away --

COACH MALONEY: We, in our league, we have a few opponents that do a lot of small ball, a lot of running. So this has been an emphasis for quite a while for our team. But we sure ratcheted it up. When we looked at what -- Kentucky had four guys who have close to 20 stolen bases. So you know that's a big part of their game. We also know they like to bunt. They like to play small ball. They have competitive at-bats.

I thought we did a really good job neutralizing that. I thought Trennor was just spectacular. I really did. Like I said, in the last two games -- he pitched a complete game last week against Kent State, an awfully good team. Today, he almost did that against a really good Kentucky team. So first of all, hats off to Trennor. But we controlled the running game. I think our catcher's won defensive player of the year in the American. If you saw the play he did in the last inning, throwing it right on the dime, the only way you could get the runner out. It was picture-perfect. It was a big emphasis of ours. We didn't want to give them anything for free.

Q. Can you talk a little bit more about the decision, when you did pull Trennor, I know his pitch count was 114, 115?

COACH MALONEY: They said he had 119. But really I wanted to take him out -- obviously you saw that we went

out there the same batter -- because I wanted a certain pitch in that situation. I thought he had done so well and I just felt like I was asking a lot in that heat for him to even do more.

And, you know, we trust our team. It's a team, like he said, that's what we live on. The team. We feel like that's one of our strengths. We have several guys who are able to contribute. And it just didn't go the way we would have liked, obviously, afterwards.

But nevertheless, it really wasn't a super hard call when he was at the mound. Each inning we were monitoring it. I gave him a lot of credit in that heat to do what he did. Like I say, the last two games he's just been super.

His best two games of his college career arguably the last two games. Played a lot of good games for us. But the last two, when it's all on the line, the big boy stepped up and you've got to give him a lot of credit.

Q. After he got that out, did you want him to stay in?

COACH MALONEY: I was kind of asking --

Q. What did they say?

COACH MALONEY: He was kind of, like, here, and I just thought, in judgment -- hindsight is always 20/20 in a game. You can always question anything anybody does. The reality is we have a lot of confidence in all of our players, and Tex had given us a monumental effort. Sometimes the game bounces that way.

I really think early in the game, when we had some good at-bats -- we executed the hit and run perfectly. We got Hunter up and he hit an absolute rocket right at second. If you get that hit to fall in might be a whole different game, the way Trennor was pitching.

But it didn't. That's the great game of baseball. Sometimes it's a game of inches.

Both teams grinded it out really well. And they were fortunate to get that big home run in that at-bat when I thought early on we were really stringing along some good at-bats for the first couple of innings.

Like I say, when Moore came in, I thought his sinker, we hit a lot of groundouts to shortstop. We kept, like Tellie said, we just kept rolling over. But that's from good pitching.

I thought what you saw today, you saw some really good pitchers out there. And they were fortunate enough to get the big inning in the eighth there to put us away.



But proud of my guys. We were right there with them. We came into the game expecting to win. So for what it's worth, in our program, we've never taken a back seat to nobody. We know Kentucky is a really good team, but we've had really good games with Kentucky in our past.

I think going into this we were like 7-7 and a few years ago we actually won a series here at this beautiful ballpark.

Nick's a great coach and his staff. But we've got a competitive bunch. The guys are sore. It's hurt to lose. It hurts to lose. We had a chance, didn't get it done. I'm proud of the guys for the effort they gave

Q. I believe it was, you had an '06, shirt on, in pregames. How was it, just calling back to that game and how big of an emphasis was that (indiscernible)?

COACH MALONEY: Well, our whole season, '06, as crazy as it may sound, as good as Ball State has been for a lot of years, people who understand baseball at a high level understand how many high draft picks we've had, how many times we've won regular season championships and we've been stymied in the tournament.

And so because the NCAA doesn't allow a second team in the Mid-American Conference for whatever reason, we've been good enough several times over, having coached at Michigan and several NCAA teams, I know what a team looks like to be in the NCAA Tournament.

And we've been snubbed. And so the '06 was the boys wanted to put '06 on their backs as a remembrance that they were going to be the team to take us to the NCAA Tournament. And they did it. And we're here. And we're being competitive.

But it was a long time coming. Interestingly to note, we -- just in my time at Ball State, I've had two stints, seven times we were in the finals. So this was the seventh time was the breakthrough to get into the NCAA Tournament, whereas, like, we'll just use Kentucky as an example and deservedly so with being in the SEC and such. But last week they knew they were already in the tournament.

Two weeks ago they already knew they were in the tournament. We had to win our tournament to get in. A few years ago we beat Arizona twice, beat Kentucky twice, and we just got snubbed.

So the '06 had a big bearing in our program because we've had a rich history. I personally coached six first-rounders at Ball State. You probably didn't know that. There's been eight in our history.

So this isn't like, you know, subtle time where somebody gets in there that's a fluke. This has been a long time coming. And I think the guys played like we do at Ball State. We played a very competitive game. We really felt like we had an opportunity to win.

And Kentucky's credit like they said superlative performance from Mason Moore, the big hit by Burkes. Big home run. And then certainly Pitre, I'm not sure if I pronounced it right, got the big hit to close out the game.

But I thought it was a good game. For some watching the game, it was a good baseball game.

Q. By the nature of the way this tournament is formatted, your season didn't end today with this loss. Have a chance to go forward. Obviously the game got away from you in the eighth inning. When you look at the game as a whole do you take away more positives from today to go forward into the next game?

COACH MALONEY: I think there were a lot of positives. I'll give you an example. Hunter Dobbins, for those who watched the game, hit three balls on the screws. He hit them really hard. And the line-out to second, he hit a fastball to shortstop that was a rocket. By the way, the shortstop at Kentucky played great. I thought he played a great shortstop.

Then he crushed a ball to center. On most days, that thing would have been gone. That thing was a bomb. But in the wind and the height of the ball it didn't give it a chance.

A takeaway from that, as simple as that, he had three barrels. Sometimes the game, the game's a hard game. It's a really hard game because sometimes you can hit the ball really well and not get a lot to show for it.

And then there's other times where you can bloop it in and it falls. It's a strange game.

But I thought the game Dobbins made throwing the guy out at second was -- if you timed it, I don't know what it was -- but I wouldn't be surprised if it was 1.85 to second. It was Major League. And it was on the dime.

This is a guy who only has caught -- literally he caught in high school, but when he came to us he couldn't catch last year because he had a hamate bone injury, so he had no time to develop. This is like one year catching at a high level catching at a high level and he's superlative.

And the play that Ryan Peltier made, it should be on ESPN's Top 10. Really should be. It was fantastic. Ryan

is our Gold Glove guy. Last year he won the Gold Glove. We had a boy at Ball State who wins the highest honor you could as a third baseman defensively. He showed it today with that fantastic play. It was a great takeaway.

I thought our hit and run that we executed was real well. And I thought we played aggressive like we wanted to. We weren't taking a back seat. We were playing to win. And again we just fell a little bit short.

But I think there is some positives to be taken away. But it always hurts to lose. Everybody's competitive. Every team in this tournament wants to win. And we are no different.

Q. That's probably the least amount of running we've seen from Kentucky this season. Do you attribute that to respect for Dobbins and...

COACH MALONEY: I think -- Nick and his staff, they were very well prepared. They're very good coaches. But they also know that we've got a really good staff and we've got a really good team. They knew we would be prepared.

So you had two guys that were battling and knowing that we were going to be prepared for them. And we were. And so I think some of it is game situation. Some of it is we've got some good players on the other side, too.

It was just a combination. I think sometimes the game just works that way.

But again, hats off to Kentucky because we both gritted it out and they found a way to win the game.

Q. What do you tell your kids, your athletes?

COACH MALONEY: I told them, when Trennor came out of the game, I told him I loved him. Proud of him. The rest of the boys, I mean, realistically, I mean, when you -- see, we didn't have the COVID year. So I got some guys that are veterans on this team. And when you've got -- you spend a lot of time together -- and in college athletics, when you ask kids to give everything they got and they give you everything they got, then it's all you can ask of anybody.

And these boys have given a lot. Last year we're the regular season champs in the MAC with 40-19, 32-7. How do you win a league at 32-7? And we had to win it on the last day.

These guys have won, 38, 38, 40 and 36 right now. They're winners. They know how to win.

So this hurts them because they wanted to win. Like I say,

a lot of people wrote us off like there was no chance that Ball State could win, but in our hearts we really felt like we could win this thing.

And losing that first game, it's painful to the guys. But I told them I'm real proud of them. I thought they played their hearts out. They were inches away from having a chance to win that game. But they didn't. And it is what it is. We'll regather. We'll look forward to competing tomorrow, whoever we play.

And the guys will grit it out and we're going to play to win. Simple as that. We'll have to beat a really good team whoever happens to play us, but we're playing to win. There's no doubt about that.

I just told the boys I'm really proud of them. And from coaching, at the end of the day, it's the relationships, that's what coaching's about. That's really what coaching's about. For these guys we have great relationships. We've got a great culture.

And I'm so proud of these guys carrying the banner for us. Our alums are so proud of the fact that they're finally in the NCAA Tournament because it's been a long time coming. So I appreciate it.

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