

College World Series: Lexington Regional

Saturday, June 3, 2023
Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Indiana Hoosiers

Coach Jeff Mercer

Phillip Glasser

Peter Serruto

Connor Foley

Postgame Press Conference

Indiana - 5, Kentucky - 3

COACH MERCER: Obviously contentious and hard-fought game. We always tell the guys to try to get to the seventh inning in a two-run game one way or the other and find a way to win it late. We did it tonight. We've been in a lot of those games.

Kentucky obviously played really well. Great college baseball game and highlighted really the strength of baseball in the Midwest. I'm really proud of the boys. And Kentucky played great. And all credit to them as well.

Q. Pete, any bigger moment in your career than that one?

PETER SERRUTO: That takes the cake. That was pretty awesome moment. I think that's number one for sure.

Q. Pete, what's going through your head as you're rounding the bases there?

PETER SERRUTO: I was just trusting myself that whole at-bat. And sticking with my approach and my plan. And just controlling my breathing and controlling everything I'm taught to do.

And once I got a fastball there and delivered, it was just kind of like a dream come true, just running around the bases and enjoying that moment with my teammates.

Q. Pete, you were down 1-2 in that count and you took three balls. Talk about sticking to the plan. How hard is it to stick to a plan when you're in that situation -- (indiscernible) a pitch you (indiscernible) to hit?



PETER SERRUTO: That pitcher did a good job challenging me with sliders there. I had to stick to my approach no matter what. I just kept replaying that same thought in my head: Don't come off the fastball; don't come off the fastball.

Just have to control my breathing. Coach Mercer always says don't play emotionally and just control that. And stick to my plan. Once I got that fastball I knew what to do, that pitch.

Q. There were a couple of those player-only meetings on the mound called by you. It was like the regular season was it the same (indiscernible)?

CONNOR FOLEY: When you get in an environment like this, just making sure everyone gets on the same page when you have some of those weird moments.

So just bringing everyone together and making sure our emotions are in check and then just going out and executing the next pitch because that's what mattered. That's what matters in these types of games.

Q. Zack, you're on deck, what's going through your mind?

PHILLIP GLASSER: When he was down two strikes and he took a really good pitch and the crowd's crazy, but I saw him just looking at his bat and he was cool. And I was, like, he's going to get this done.

I don't know about an oppo jack, but I knew that he wasn't going to give that at-bat away because of his emotions. But he did an unbelievable job stepping in there as a fifth-year guy.

And everyone looks up to him. And you come up in those moments and he delivers. I'm so happy for him.

Q. Connor, you're out there with 6,000 people screaming for the other team. Tell me what's going through your head and how you're able to challenge that and (indiscernible) throw strikes?



CONNOR FOLEY: It was definitely a challenge, but especially in the bullpen you've got guys all over you. And you've just got to focus in. Kind of just block them out, almost.

You really want to take it in, but you've got to focus at the task at hand and that was getting three outs in the bottom of the 9th, or top, whatever it was, the 2.2 innings that I pitched. And that was basically it.

Q. Connor, what was going through your mind when you had those two close calls on right field wall, one barely foul when they (indiscernible) off the bat (indiscernible) home runs?

CONNOR FOLEY: I'd be lying to you if I didn't think they were gone. We have a great defense. Morgan made two spectacular catches out there. And Phil, the last out. And then everybody else, just spectacular defense.

It's so easy to pitch with those guys behind you. I was really confident. And they all supported me and encouraged me the entire outing. So it was really not as bad as you think.

Q. Connor, you were up at 97 today. How do you maintain that energy throughout your appearance?

CONNOR FOLEY: It just comes naturally, the adrenaline. The situation's pretty big. Like somebody said, there's like 6,000 people out there and it just kind of comes kind of naturally. And you just have to contain it and harness it and use it to your advantage.

Q. Phillip, you had a great (indiscernible) swing there to start off the team, but the team struggled with Lee's slider throughout that game. What were your conversations in the dugout (indiscernible) to get to the point at which you got (indiscernible)?

PHILLIP GLASSER: He was executing all three pitches, and he was really living at the bottom of the zone. It's tough when a guy does that and just trying to not expand low. Try to get him up in the zone. And keep fighting off his off-speed. And eventually get a fastball and do some damage with it. And that's exactly what Pete did.

Q. You and Connor on opposite ends when it comes to experience at the college level. What are you telling him in the moments where you dealt with environments like this (indiscernible)?

PETER SERRUTO: Just kind of in between innings we're in the dugout I just kept reminding him he has to trust

himself. He throws 97. It's pretty tough when you're standing in the batter's box to square that up.

He's so talented. I'm so proud of him just to see him develop over the course of the season. Such a talented kid but such a better kid, too. He's going to be a really special player and he's already contributing so much for us. We relied on him tonight.

Q. Connor, the bullpen has had a lot of success, (indiscernible). What's the reason behind that?

CONNOR FOLEY: It's definitely the experience of being in close games. But the main thing is just great coaching. Glant and Merc, putting in those situations in practice, and in games, too. It just prepares us for these moments.

Like I said before, just the great defense behind. It just helps so much, too.

Q. Tyler slipped on a shallow pop up in the second -- had that error that scored a run for Kentucky in the second. Did you say anything to him to calm him down since he's a freshman in this big situation?

PHILLIP GLASSER: Right when that happened it was kind of a weird play. That was one of our meetings, we came to the mound and just made sure that we kept the game right there and didn't let it get out of hand.

Because we've always have to give our offense a shot to be able to come back. We were able to do that, minimize the damage and then we were able to pull it out late. But if that inning gets away we probably don't have a chance.

Q. Did you think Tyler was just being too quick on that play what did you see?

PHILLIP GLASSER: I was looking at the ball. He may have just lost his footing. It just happens. He's a great player, and he'll move on and he's been great for us all year.

Q. I've only seen it in the movies where a guy with no power who hits the game-winning home run. I'm not sure I've seen it in a game. Has this sunk in, how unexpected the way you won the game with a home run from a guy who doesn't hit them often being the difference in one of the biggest games?

COACH MERCER: I've learned in my life that God works in mysterious ways. Sometimes it's meant to be. There couldn't be a better kid in the world than Pete Serruto to do that. Matt Ellis, Preseason All-American goes down. And AJ Shepard, who's one of the best recruits in the

conference goes down. And now Pete is catching for the last six weeks.

He's so dutiful. All he cares about is winning. I asked him to lay a bunt down and he doesn't care. I asked him to hit and run, doesn't care. No matter what it is, he's such a team-first guy.

And when you have guys that are invested into doing the right things and they're competitive to that -- like you talk about the two-strike approach -- and just fight, fight, fight. And good things happen. You put yourself in a position to be successful.

I don't know that I had envisioned that. But we've been in so many close games and we've competed our way through those things that every now and then you capture a little bit of magic and it happened tonight for Pete. Very exciting.

Q. When Lee gets throwing like he did in the middle innings, and Kentucky takes a lead, what's your message as a coach to the team to stick with it and keep chipping away and eventually hope to take the lead like you guys ultimately did?

COACH MERCER: If you're going to get to a good starter -- and he is -- you try to get to him early. Once he rolls that changeup report.

I know our scouting report. He's not a huge change-up guy per se, but I know against us they're going to be a high changeup usage. Everybody errs on the side of changeups against us. We're typically very good against fastballs we're trained heavily. If you can't hit a fastball you can't play at this level.

I know the changeups will be typically what people go to. His changeup is unique breaks like a breaking ball. First time through I told the guy you have to treat it like a breaking rule. We have a specific rules for a breaking ball.

I'll say if it's, in general, it's got to be head high or above halfway to you, in middle 8 to 10 inches of the plate. I said you have to treat the changeup like a breaking ball rule. And that seemed to help us a little bit.

But it was still a really good pitch. He did a great job. And then the longer he goes in the game we started putting some decent swings on it. And you start to see a guy three times and maybe even that fourth time you start to see a guy, if you're worth your salt at all as an offense you have to start to adjust.

We didn't. We struck out ten times and didn't walk. I don't

know realistically as poor of a performance the entire year tonight. We ran into a solo homer and a three-run homer. We were really fortunate in that regard, but we were not good offensively.

Credit to him he did a really good job. It's to get us to adjust to the change-up, knowing they would typically go to a change-up, but the action was more unique than a typical change-up.

And the slider was really tight. The guys were coming back in and it's like it's starting on the corner but staying on the corner. So then you don't know if you should swing at it or not because it's not a typical -- it's like one of those gyro sliders, where, again, I don't have the TrackMan. So I don't know that to be the case.

But that's what it looked like from the side where it just kind of started to the corner and hung on the corner. Then he could take it off when he wanted to. He was on his game. He was terrific.

So I just kept telling the guys you've got to get to the seventh in a two-run game. Get to the seventh in a two-run game and find a way late to push through.

Honestly, I was hoping they'd go to the pen. I'd just change the look or something. But obviously they're smart and they're going to keep going with the guy who's whipping our tail, and he did.

Q. You spoke at Michigan State, you said the game was going to be won or lost with Connor Foley. Was that the same sentiment tonight after that hit-by-pitch?

COACH MERCER: I just sent a couple guys down to make them think we might do something else. I wanted somebody to have a meeting and talk about the scouting report, like, who's going -- No. 22 -- and all of a sudden they're not thinking about the fact we just hit two guys in the back.

He was going to be the guy. He was going to be the guy. He's tough as nails. A three-sport athlete. Indiana high school basketball player. Great basketball player. Actually Indiana football was recruiting him at the same time I was recruiting him for baseball, as a tight end.

Maybe the most physically gifted player in the state for his class. He just wasn't a pure baseball guy. And the fastball's real. It's a real fastball, as you could see. He mixed a few breaking balls or a few off-speed pitches in there. I think probably helped him a little bit to give someone something to think about.

The only thing was with us being the home team, now if it gets out of hand, they score three runs, four runs and all of a sudden we're down by two or three and he obviously doesn't have it, then we have to go to somebody else.

But no, so until we spit it up it's going to be his. He earned the right to be trusted. You have to trust your guys and I trusted him. And so did Glant.

Q. Your motto has been "win today today" and just go with your pitchers. Does that change at all in a certain scenario if you lose tomorrow night you know you're still alive?

COACH MERCER: It's my first time being here. I don't have a whole lot of experience and telling you what I would do or not do quite yet. Need a little time to think about it.

I don't know. I try to be honest with you, but I really don't know yet. I'll have to kind of think about it and talk with Coach Glant tomorrow.

And, like you said, my motto typically, I'm pretty singularly focused on just win this game while you have a chance to win this game. If somebody gets back up for the second game that wouldn't have been up otherwise, maybe that helps us.

But baseball is such a funny game. It's such a hard game to predict, and the way the ball bounces. If you have a chance to win you go for it. It's like us for Foley, I know we're down by a couple, but we just gotta keep going with him. You don't get him out, hey, he could come back tomorrow, and how are we going to cover the rest of the games.

If we don't win today it's going to be tough anyway. So let's just finish it out. We'll probably err on the side of win the game at hand, but I reserve the right to change my mind.

Q. This was a game with a lot of juice. It might be a game that would rattle an experienced guy. Your team hasn't been in one. What's the trait they're calling upon to be tough? And what traits do you feel like are being grown in this team by the success?

COACH MERCER: Well, we work hard at it. And it begins in the recruiting process. We talked about that. Last night which feels like two weeks ago. We start the recruiting process. We worked really hard to thoroughly vet the kids and their families.

Are they going to have the personality traits to be able to manage in these moments and handle these moments? Multi-sport guys really help and so on and so on. But we're

very thorough in those things.

And we start from the very beginning of the fall, explaining what wins in these moments and what loses in these moments. And I'm not a complete history buff but I enjoy it and I try to use a lot of different historical references and different examples.

I think the best predictor of the future is the past. So there are people on earth that have figured this thing out before. Like, we put a man on the moon in the '60s. We can figure it out again. How to control our breathing, how to control our emotions, how to compete with confidence, how to do those things.

That's usually what it is. It's just your own mindset. Then we have to put them in competitive environments in the fall. I have to be hard on them. I have to.

Dustin Glant has to be hard on them. We have to hold them to account. Everybody has to be held to account in that regard.

I think pushing them early on, even when it's uncomfortable, to understand what wins and loses, I was really hard on Connor Foley this fall. Like he hated me. I didn't travel him the first weekend. He didn't throw strikes in the fall.

He was noncompetitive at times. His velocity would fluctuate from 87 to 97, and it bothered me. I let him know that quite a few times.

And I challenged him. I challenged him that he was going to be able to compete in moments like this knowing that for us to be successful he was going to have to do it. And all the boys, that they're all going to have to handle these moments.

You play baseball at a Power Five school. You play baseball at a program that's been to the College World Series. You're playing baseball and representing 7 million people if you can't control yourself, then you can't do this.

I think the culmination of those things put together helped them to be able to stabilize. Then you have to go on the road and play. You can't hide from competition. You can't duck from competition. You have to understand you're going to get your butt kicked sometimes.

There are times we got our butt kicked this year and you have to turn off Twitter, not worry about what people are saying, because you know you're building an experience, that if you don't go through it and you don't fail and you don't experience it, then you can't ever build from it. It's

fine.

It's like raising kids. I've got two kids. If I don't ever smack my kid in the butt when they do something wrong, then they'll keep doing things wrong. They have to learn there's consequences.

The only way to learn consequences in baseball is to go play really good teams and go live; and figuratively speaking, you get your butt smacked just like my dad smacked my butt. You live and learn and you grow up through those experiences, and that helps a ton.

Q. It's been a couple of weeks since we've seen Ryan Kraft taken out, 48 pitches today, four innings, what did you see from his outing?

COACH MERCER: The primary thing that was the most important was his health. That's why we were checking with him constantly.

He's done two or three different live outings between when he pitched last and when he pitched today. He's seen the doctors several times. He just managed to give us a chance.

We went through a game through two, go essentially pitch by pitch to get to Yoho when you thought Yoho was the best matchup after Kraft and then Foley to finish it.

Oftentimes, you want to have your best -- this sounds cliché -- but your best fastball late if you're going to have predominantly, have a sinker guy, going to have the changeup and the slider, you're going to give Foley the most length after those guys.

So we really just wanted to get through two and then kind of figure it out from there. But once you rolled a couple of quick outs, couple quick innings, we got through four with him, got through the fourth.

Klein (phonetic) said, what do you think? We got two more than we asked for, than what we thought we would get. Let's go ahead, get him out of there while he feels good, and we're set up. Now Craig would have to go for us. And he did a good job. You knew that Foley -- he was going to have a chance to be successful. The fastball profile was going to give him a chance. And he hung in there. But his health was most important.

Q. You made some defensive replacements, and then right on queue, Morgan Colopy in right field. Did you think he had a bead on that, Devin Burke's line drive, or what were your thoughts?

COACH MERCER: Morgan is probably the best right fielder defensively. So I coached Peyton Burdick at Wright State. And Peyton was a terrific right fielder.

Morgan is probably his equal. He's incredible at going back. We knew with Foley on the mound, another line coming up, that right field was going to get action.

So Coach Weatherford does a great job with our shifts. It was like you've got to play him deep, give him a chance. I knew if it stayed in the ballpark, he would catch it. I didn't know if it was going to stay in the ballpark. That was going to be the issue. He smoked it. He smoked it.

He hit it too hard too low. If he hit it that hard, obviously hard and high -- sounds ridiculous, obviously it would go over the fence -- but he hit it so hard that it almost like didn't have a chance to climb and that was the only reason. But I did think if it stayed in the ballpark, the way we were positioned Morgan would catch the ball because he's a Gold Glove-caliber defender.

And it was interesting, I was talking to some of the players, Bobby and Hunter are such veterans -- I said, okay, we stay at one run because we always run our defensive unit, always run that subunit, Morgan and Sam, because they're league defenders.

The question is, if you stay at one, do we go to our unit -- knowing we're the home team, we're going to hit if they tie or take the lead -- regardless, we're going to hit the bottom.

We were going back and forth. I was talking to Hunter. Hunter is a really smart baseball guy. And then we scored the second run. It was like, never mind, don't worry about it, we don't have to debate. We're at two. Now that we're at two, we for sure go to our special teams unit.

And like I said yesterday, great players make coaches look smart. And, I mean, he's a great player, and he was in the right spot at the right time and did his job really well.

Q. Devin Taylor has, over the last few weeks, struggled a little bit at the plate. Had one really good game, you moved him down. Today he really came through against a really good pitcher. What was he doing differently today? How is he progressing?

COACH MERCER: Devin, it's hard being such a good player at such a young age, then having so much -- not a target on your back, but there is -- everybody's game planning for you and you're still a young man, learn to grow and figure things out.

He went to a no-stride. He brought up that going to a

no-stride this past week at practice. And we kind of went back and forth a little bit, Coach Weatherford and I. I finally said, he's a great player. Great players have feel. Let him do what he feels he needs to do to find the barrel again.

So maybe he doesn't have as much pull-side power like that, fine, get on the barrel, get to left center, middle of the field. Single or double. We can drive a run in. We can do something, we've just got to move it along.

He's been such a huge part of the offense all year and his great power. But right now we just didn't move the offense. And he did that.

So kudos to him for being a problem solver and just saying, I'm going go to a no-stride. I'll hit the ball the other way. I'll be competitive. I'll do whatever the team needs me to do to win, and he did that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports