

College World Series: Lexington Regional

Monday, June 5, 2023

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Hunter Gilliam

Darren Williams

Mason Moore

Devin Burkes

Postgame Press Conference

Kentucky - 4, Indiana - 2

Q. When Coach Roszel came out for the mound visit in the first, was there anything different that maybe he told you that he wouldn't normally have, or was there anything special to it or just normal?

DARREN WILLIAMS: I think it was more Devin getting after me, firing me up, because it was a big situation, man, and just settled down, execute pitches, try not to do too much was the message. Stuff's good enough, just execute.

Q. You just looked at Risedorph and smiled. I don't know what he looked at, but when you looked at your line, has the moment hit you what you did this weekend? You probably put together one of the gutsiest pitching performances in this program's history. With Friday and today what would you say (indiscernible)?

MASON MOORE: I was just out there throwing. I knew I had a job to do. And we knew they'd be attacking early, swinging early. I have trust, I have faith in the defense. I knew my job was to go out there, attack the strike zone, let our defense make plays.

Q. Thinking back to last year, postseason play seems to click with you. What makes you shine in these situations?

DEVIN BURKES: Just gotta put it all out there. It's my favorite time of the year. It's make it or break it. You don't



have time to sit there think about stuff. Just go out there and play every day.

Q. Mason, you said on Friday about how you were starting to get tired, you felt the crowd pumping you up. You're out there today in front of the largest crowd in Kentucky baseball history. How did that feel to advance to the Super Regional in front of that crowd?

MASON MOORE: Like Gillie said yesterday, we don't do tired. I know I wasn't 100 percent tonight. I knew I had one job and that was to go out there and give my best effort with the defense I had behind me. I had no worries they'd make every play. And that was my mindset to go out there and just give the best performance I can for the team.

Q. Devin and Hunter, there's that adage about (indiscernible) order seeing a guy. Their starter really frustrated you guys the first two trips here (indiscernible). Was there a time when (indiscernible) at that point you see something you thought you could break through on?

HUNTER GILLIAM: Yes. So all the credit to that guy. He was really good. He competed with a bunch of pitches in the zone. And I think the third time through, you put in so much time and you put in so much work -- and Devo is the king of work. And we get after it.

It was just I think good things happen to good people and we both got good swings off in a big-time moment. It was good to see.

Q. Devin, you said earlier in the week you weren't aware this Regional was double-elimination format. Now that you're the MVP of that format how do you feel? And are you aware Super Regionals are two out of three?

DEVIN BURKES: Yeah, I mean, you know what I'm saying? I'm just trying to come through for my team. That's all it is. That's all you've got to do in big situations. But yeah, it's fun. It's fun.



Q. You hit the ball well yesterday, obviously. What do you feel like you all learned from that in terms of (indiscernible) with a different pitcher, different coach?

DEVIN BURKES: Like Gillie said that guy was pretty good. He was throwing all three pitches for strikes. Kind of the same thing as that Ball State pitcher. He pitched really well, threw a lot of things in the zone.

You've got to get your timing a little off, get you to roll over and pop up. Just grinding away, grinding away and getting a pitch, not necessarily that you can do damage with, but just put the barrel on.

And obviously me and Gillie and a couple of other people just came through with clutch hits.

Q. Mason, can you talk a little bit about the energy in the crowd? Looked like they were trying to lift you a little bit.

MASON MOORE: Yeah, especially at the end of the game when I was pushing 70 pitches. It's nice having a crowd being able to show out again. It just gave me the energy to want to keep going.

I knew we had guys in the bullpen warming up. But with the crowd behind me it gave me the confidence to want to go out there and complete the game for us.

Q. One time I looked up you were in the dugout (indiscernible) how much fun were you guys having? How much easier does it make you in games when you're having fun not stressing out?

HUNTER GILLIAM: I was enjoying watching Byers get thrown in the air myself. I've never seen anything like that before but the vibes in the dugout were unbelievable.

I mean we got a group of just really good friends up there. We aren't ready to be done playing with each other yet. So it's super fun.

Q. Coach gave you a moment at the mic there in front of the fans. How much does it mean to this program, how special you guys are heading to supers?

DARREN WILLIAMS: Like Coach said, it's like what we talked about day one. Just not being a good team, as being one of the best teams. And being our best in June.

And it means the world. This program means the world to me. They've taken me in. And I give the credit to Coach Minge. He lets the guys in the locker room, these four guys up here, just control the locker room, be the voice in

the locker room.

And I love every teammate that I've had this year and last year. I could go through every single one of them. The program means the world, fans mean the world. I couldn't be happier of the decision I made to come to Kentucky.

COACH MINGIONE: That's a Kentucky boy right there. That's what it's about right there.

Q. The Supers -- redshirt freshman.

DARREN WILLIAMS: Back in the day.

Q. Finishing things up -- could you even put in words how poetic this is for you that now you're going to go to where you (indiscernible)?

DARREN WILLIAMS: Yeah, man, I'm at a loss for words. I mean, it's the goal, it's the dream, it's right there on the wall.

Omaha, you're two wins away now. And you go back, like we talked about last week, I think, all the 6:00 a.m. workouts, everything I did last summer through rehab. The gruelling practices in the fall where I was out here not throwing that day. And all I could do was cheer these guys on to get better.

This moment right here, worth every single thing I've done the last seven years, every single thing. Every tough outing, every gritty one like this one tonight. Every great outing.

For that dogpile right there. That means the world, man. So hopefully we can do it one more time.

Q. What did you learn from that first series at LSU (indiscernible)?

DEVIN BURKES: Just compete as hard as we can. They're a good team. We're also a good team. Just compete. At the end of the day it's not about nothing else. The best team that wins. It's the team that plays the best, not the best team that wins.

It's just compete, like I said, that's the biggest thing, compete and have fun.

Q. This is a group that signs every autograph after every game but you were able to run around the stadium high five everybody that you met. What's that like, world record almost?

HUNTER GILLIAM: That was one of the coolest things I've

ever done. Just going by and seeing everyone, their reactions and just how much this meant to everyone else.

And it's been unbelievable for me to be here. And transfer-portal guy, who never got a chance to play in the postseason ever. I never played in a conference tournament before. Nothing.

And we just won a Regional in front of all those people. And it's just so cool. I know the portal is crazy right now. And these coaches do such a good job bringing in good people and good players.

And there's no reason that anyone in the portal who gets a call from these people shouldn't want to come here.

Q. You pitched four strong innings. You go out. Mason comes in. He looks so confident. What do you say to him? Are you talking to him in between innings? What's going on there?

DARREN WILLIAMS: I probably talked to Mason more than anybody in the world the last four months. We room together on the road. He's like a little brother to me.

So I was calm. Whenever Mason comes in the game, I'm calm. He's got some of the best pitches in the entire country, not just this team, not just this league, not just this tournament -- the country. I think he's going to be a Big Leaguer one day.

And, man, you've just got to fire him up and make sure he was on his game. And he was. I think all three of us every single inning was going up asking him if he was tired, slapping him on the chest. We were pulling him through as much as he was pulling the rest of the team through tonight. We were calm with Mason in that game, just like we will be next weekend.

Q. The offensive guys, Indiana were very complimentary of Mason's stuff, and you guys rolling -- you competed against them in the fall (indiscernible) is that a pretty good description (indiscernible)?

HUNTER GILLIAM: We actually had inner squad a few weeks -- last weekend, after we came back from Hoover, and I told Mason he could sleep good that night knowing he didn't have to face me that weekend. But it was really me sleeping good, knowing that I didn't have to face him (laughter).

COACH MINGIONE: Thank you for being here. Obviously a special night. And it doesn't happen with a lot of people. And especially thankful for Mr. Barnhart and Dr. Capilouto and everyone for building that stadium.

That is what we dreamed and hoped of one day, that we would see all those people in there. Our student-athletes would get a chance to celebrate and win a championship. So I'm super thankful for them and proud of our team.

Q. You got your dogpile that you've talked about before, (indiscernible) momentum to 2017, a long time ago. It was the same road as 2017 winning three in a row. Just how poetic is that?

COACH MINGIONE: That's my favorite thing to do as a coach. This team was built a long time ago. When you think about recruiting in baseball, guys commit when they're freshmen in high school, and sophomores. And to have all those guys come through and deliver in that moment and watch them celebrate, it doesn't get any better as a coach because they're the ones that have made the pitches. They're the ones that have made the plays. They are the ones that went to the workouts. They're the ones that went to class. They're the ones that do it.

And when you get a chance to just see pure joy, it's one of the best feelings as a coach. That's the only thing you could ever hope for on a field is to watch your team celebrate. And I was soaking it in. And I was loving every second of it.

Q. What do you feel like you learned about your guys this weekend that maybe you didn't see in the conference tournament or even late in the season? What did they reveal about their resilience or just knowledge of the game?

COACH MINGIONE: Well, I don't know if this is something that I learned about them because I knew after the fall that we had a team that could compete for a championship. The thing that I'm super thankful for -- and you heard them talking about throwing up Evan Byers. And I'm thankful that they got to a spot that they could let loose and just play free. Because we're talented enough.

But the fact that they could just take a deep breath and just -- sometimes you've got to stop caring so much, to where it's like it doesn't constrict you.

And Mr. Barnhart's message about a month ago, about taking off the shackles and going for it. We're going for it. Towards the end of the year we were pressing some at times but we did not press. They just kind of let loose and they went for it. So I was thankful that they were able to do that.

Q. Darren was able to get out of that bases loaded, nobody-out jam only allowing one. And Mason had the

second and third, one out, didn't give up anything. Just the jobs they were able to do in those two innings specifically?

COACH MINGIONE: When you sit there and you think about anytime you can have the bases loaded and no outs and you only give up one run that is a victory for the defense. And they had another time they got third base, no outs and didn't score.

So our ability to minimize -- Darren, he'll keep you on the edge of your seat, won't you? We're at UT a couple weeks ago, it's like, man, he'll keep you on there.

But he gave us everything he had. What a warrior. What a warrior Darren Williams is. And Mason was fantastic.

Q. What about Devin makes him thrive in these situations (indiscernible) just the way he played all weekend?

COACH MINGIONE: He's a warrior. I've got to tell you something about Devin Burkes. At the end of the fall we do meetings at the beginning and at the end of every fall. And sometimes in the middle.

But we basically explained to him that he had won the catching job and that we would still catch two catchers. We would want him to be fresh for late in the year. Hey, look, there's a chance you could lose that job, but as of today -- and one thing we asked him to do, hey, when we come back in the spring, Devin, I think it would be a really good idea for you to just swing by and pop in the offices every day just to say hi.

If there's anything, you're going to help Coach Roszel lead the pitching staff. If there's something he needs to share with you or whatever, it's totally up to you, you don't have to. But if you choose you should pop by, totally up to you.

That guy's come by our office every day. Every day that guy comes in and I hear him at the end of the hallway and he lights up the office with his, hey, what's up? It's, like, Coach, what's up? Hey, Brock, Coach, what's up?

And I'm like, all right he's coming down. He makes his way. He stops at all the offices and he stops in my office and we spend time together every day. I've learned so much about him. Personally this guy, shhwew, this guy is different. Whew, even brought his mom by the office today. He literally brought his mom by the office today.

This guy is a winner and he cares and he wants to win. And, whew, he's a special dude, a very special dude.

Q. Pitching staff, you had the 26 runs yesterday, but for the whole Regional you had two shutouts, you gave up just two runs tonight. Did you feel going into this season that you had this kind of staff?

COACH MINGIONE: We knew the strength of our staff was going to be the depth. And I kept getting those questions from a lot of you in February. And then we got into the couple weeks of March, and by the time we started up opening up SEC play it dawned on me that this was as deep a pitching staff as I've had here. That's saying a lot because we've had a lot of really good arms.

So the depth of our pitching staff is definitely one of our strengths. There's no way you come out of the losers' bracket and to put up those few of runs, and you're only going to do that with a really good defense. But our pitchers -- Coach Roszel is a premier coach, everywhere he's been. You go back, look at his track record.

He's put together some really good staffs. You even heard Darren mention his name afterwards because of all the time and effort that he's poured into our guys. It was definitely a good thing.

Q. Going back to Devin, he caught five games in this Regional, the last two days, hottest days of the year, and still produce like that with the bat, talk about doing that in these conditions.

COACH MINGIONE: It's unreal. So towards the end of the year, they were in a stretch where he wasn't getting as many hits. He wasn't doing as well. And I had some people in my ear about, hey, I think Devin's wearing down, he's getting tired and these kind of things.

So you guys might laugh at this, but I said, Devo, one of his days in my office -- I was, like, Dev, I got a bunch of people in my ear telling me that you're tired. Like, I don't know, like, you ain't hitting as good. What do you want me to tell these people? Because I can't tell you how many people are telling me this.

He goes, you tell them that a tired catcher don't steal bases. I stole four bases last week. Do you think my legs are tired? Yes, sir, I'll tell them. (Laughs).

He's like this guy -- and I went up to him yesterday. I said, hey, you're going to have to catch 18 innings. Devin, I want you to know I told our staff you're from the state of Florida, you've played in a lot of double-headers, and I have total peace you're going to dominate this. You're going to take care of your body. I asked him about his hydration. I said, I just want you to know ahead of time, you are going to do awesome today. You've done this your

whole life. This is no different. He's like, Coach, I got this, I'm built for this. I said, you are, get ready. I'm coming, Coach, I'm coming.

Q. Just the fact that second Super Regional for Kentucky in history, you've been with both of them, has that sunk in yet? If not, when do you think it will. And you (indiscernible) 2017 what you guys did, winning the first game, losing the second game, winning three straight. Are there any parallels you see between those two clubs?

COACH MINGIONE: Let me answer the first one. Coach Madison, will you come up here, please? When I showed up in 2017, this man asked me -- he said, Nick, if there's ever anything I can do for you, will you please let me know, I'll do whatever. And I said, Coach, you coached here 25 years. Nobody knows Kentucky baseball better than you. He said, Nick, I want to help. I want to serve, I'll do whatever.

I said, Coach, what do you think about, like, doing a staff bible study? And he says, I'll do it. And in 2016, it was the fall, he's been leading our coaches in a bible study every week for seven years. And I'll never forget this. And that very first time we ever met, in '17, he told me -- he said, Nick, if you do this, I'll guarantee you you'll have a great year.

I'm a first-time head coach. I've never been a head coach at any level. I've never been a T-ball head coach, a high school head coach, a summer ball head coach -- Mitch Barnhart gave me an opportunity of a lifetime. And I perked up. I said, what do I have to do? Coach, I'm all ears.

He said, you have to do three things, Nick. He said, you have to pray for your players every day. You have to pray for your staff and you have to pray for your players' parents.

If you do that, I guarantee you, you will have a great year. And I've done my best job to try to do that. And we've had good years. We've had some years -- we had one really, really bad year, record-wise.

But we've been really close. Two out of three years we've been one or two games short. And the parallels -- we have a group of people that have prayed. I've got a list of people here. I believe in the power of prayer.

My wife has prayed for seven straight years. Her sisters at BSF and her prayer warriors, they pray. Mitch, Connie, Coach, Miss Sharon, Mac, Kirby, Aaron, Jason, Ryan, Matt, KG, Nathaniel, Austin, Mimi, Chris, Glen, Bo,

Clayton, Nicki, Jim, Matt, Rick, Matt, Joy, Jason, Sean, Eddie.

He told me last year, he said, all right, Nick, here's what you need to do. You need to find seven people to pray for you and your program and your players every day. And I made my rounds and I called people.

So the parallels is God has had his hands all over this. Two tough teams that want to do everything they can for Kentucky. And, Coach, I could not do this without you.

Thank you. Give it up for Coach Madison for 25 years. He deserves this.

He's been doing this for seven years, he's been keeping me straight.

Q. Mason his performance this weekend has to be one of the gutsiest performances in a long time. What can you say about what he put together?

COACH MINGIONE: He's special. And if you were to go back and look at our season, he's right in the middle of a lot of our wins. And he's super talented. The bowling ball is exactly what it's like trying to hit it.

He throws it to both sides of the plate. All he's done is get better since he's been here. We talked about him on Friday night. It seems like every week, every day, he just keeps getting better.

He's an unbelievable athlete. I told you guys about that about him, like dunking, doing everything, whew. And I'm thankful he's a Wildcat. I believe what W said. He'll be playing baseball a long time, to be able to manipulate the baseball the way he does and land multiple pitches for a strike, pretty special.

Q. You were talking about the last time guys did this in '17. You had the thunderstorm and the rainbows in the ball park and staff cleaning off seats and all. This time you flat out asked the crowd to show. What did you think when you walked out there and saw that crowd (indiscernible)?

COACH MINGIONE: I'm just very thankful. One thing I will tell you about UK fans and the Big Blue Nation is they want to get behind you. They want to cheer for you. And they appreciate toughness. They appreciate hard work. They appreciate energy. They appreciate selflessness.

And I paused when I went out there earlier in the game and I was just thankful. I just did a look-around and I just saw all the people and I was just so very thankful.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

And really happy for Mitch, too, because when you invest this kind of money and you do something like that, he's the one that had the vision for this. We never had a stadium that big, never invested that amount of money into something for baseball.

And when you get an opportunity to win a championship and do that, I'm just really happy for him and his staff because they had the vision of this. They thought this was possible. And the fact that we were able to do it on our home field is pretty neat.

Our players -- one thing I'll say about the fans is, earlier in the year, when it's really cold and there's not as many people, a lot of times we have to create our own energy. And the fans created it for us. And that was special.

Q. The fans showing up, what you (indiscernible) how do you allow yourself, the players, to enjoy this versus like guys (indiscernible) that's what we were here to do the Regionals to keep going?

COACH MINGIONE: That's a really good question. And one thing we've told our team from day one is that every win and every loss has an expiration date. And they can celebrate and be happy today. But after tomorrow it expires. It's over. And we're back to zero.

And one thing I shared with our team this year I thought was really good. I don't know where I learned this, but yesterday's history, tomorrow is a mystery. Today is the present. That's why they call it a gift. So let's just stay right here in the right now.

Yesterday's history, tomorrow's a mystery, today is the present and it's a gift. Let's stay right here. That's the good healthy place to be. But after midnight, this win expires and we've got to move on to the next thing.

And I think it's a good example especially for young student-athletes, they have so many things going on in their lives. And there's so many things and decisions they make every day. It just helps them stay grounded. And they've done a really good job of that.

Tonight we'll celebrate. But then I even had one of my players come up to me, tomorrow, Coach, after midnight this is over. I've got day two lift tomorrow. Austin Strickland's trying to get into the weight room. I'll figure out the schedule. Haven't done that yet.

Q. You talked about the first night in Baton Rouge earlier this year. You couldn't prepare your guys for that. You've been there, you're going back. How

different is that going to be obviously having done that earlier this year?

COACH MINGIONE: Great team, great program. I know their head coach well. We're good friends. He's one of the premier coaches in the country.

I think anytime that you can go somewhere that you've already been, that definitely helps. And I told them, I don't know how to prepare you to have 13,000 people go against you.

But we've been there. They have great fans. They're great people. And it will definitely be a different environment now. It's a really good one, but it will go up another level. But the fact that our guys have experienced that definitely helps.

Q. You talked a little bit earlier about taking the loss early on, having progressed through the bracket with one loss. Now that the dust is settled and you're moving out of this region, you won the region. As you keep going through the postseason, (indiscernible) one of the best teams in the country, (indiscernible) were able to have their backs against the ropes. They have the pressure of the world but to be able to loose and calm put together such great performances and advance anyway?

COACH MINGIONE: That's something to build upon. We've had our backs against the wall before. And to have to do that and win three straight games against really good teams. I mean, West Virginia and Indiana, you've heard me say it all week -- those are really good teams and really well-coached teams. To be able to do that, and for them to know they're two wins away from taking a picture in front of that, that's where you're supposed to go.

That's why we have it in here as a constant reminder. Every detail in this facility was mapped intentionally. So every day they walk in, they come in that door, they see Kentucky, number one, and they see Omaha as they walk to their seats.

It was set up this way intentionally. They have two more wins where we get an opportunity to take a picture right there. So excited about the opportunity.

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