

College World Series: Lexington Super Regional

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Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Nick Mingione

Mitchell Daly

Ryan Nicholson

Press Conference



can bunt, he can steal bases, and that's pretty similar up and down the lineup. They can lay down bunts, they can hit homers, they can move the ball. They have good at-bats, guys that can hit.

I would say that if you made me pick one word, multidimensional. Is that one word? Two maybe? I wasn't an English major, as you can tell.

Q. What major were you?

NICK MINGIONE: I was an aerospace studies major. I went to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, have all my core requirements, general education and three minors, one in business, psychology and humanities.

Q. Normal path to being a baseball coach?

NICK MINGIONE: That's what you do. That's exactly what you do.

A lot of my former teammates and guys I coached are working for Boeing and Lockheed Martin and they're doing better than I am, but they're a lot brighter than I am, too.

Q. Do you fly?

NICK MINGIONE: No, no, but I remember being at practice and having our players do their solos flying over the practice and flapping their wings and us being like, man, look at them. Totally different than the life here for sure.

Q. The way you described Oregon State's team, it kind of sounds like you could be describing your own. Are there some similarities?

NICK MINGIONE: Very much so. Very much so. Older guys, guys that can navigate through a lineup, competitive at-bats, and multidimensional. Absolutely, very, very similar type offenses.

Q. Speaking on the similarities, do the similarities help you prepare to face them kind of knowing, seeing it firsthand with your team, what those things can do to

NICK MINGIONE: Great week of practice. Looking forward to this weekend.

Q. We just had Travis Bazzana up here. You guys faced off against LSU last year in this position with Paul Skenes. How do you strike that balance between respecting the guy and not being intimidated by all his accomplishments?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, so that's the beauty of our conference is when you look at even the mock draft now and you see who the projected top hitters are in our conference but also the country, I think we've faced them all, haven't we, after this weekend?

Obviously respect him. We respect all of our opponents, but we don't fear anyone, but at the same time we have to be smart on how we go about attacking him.

Q. Mitchell, what have you seen -- you've been a part of teams that have made it all the way to Omaha. What have you seen from this team that gives you confidence you can do it again?

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, just the mentality. These guys in the locker room are just a bunch of winners. When you have that mentality and a long lineup of people that just want to compete and want to grind out pitchers and attack on the mound, you're going to be in a good spot. Total confidence in this team going forward, and we're excited for it.

Q. Coach, how would you describe Oregon State's lineup, just the challenge that they present?

NICK MINGIONE: I would say they're multidimensional. When you look at even in the leadoff spot, he can bunt. He



another team?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, the beauty of this time of year and I think they would tell you the same thing, is when you face teams this late in the year, more than likely you have faced a team that is very similar. When you start hearing, thinking about it, we had 14 regular season weeks, then we had the conference tournament, that's 15. The regional week, that was 16. There's a lot of different opponents and a lot of different styles of play. So it is safe to say that we've faced teams that are very similar.

Obviously for us, we do a great job of preparing for our opponents, but at the same time, we're more concerned about us executing whatever the game demands. Whatever that might be, I feel confident that our players have been prepared and that we'll be ready for whatever the game shoots at them this weekend.

Q. Mitchell, can you speak on -- we know what a versatile hitter you are, but to have Lopez in front of you in the lineup and Ryan Nicholson behind you, that protection, how much that affords you to be that versatile guy in the 5 spot in the order?

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, like you said, it's awesome having this guy here with 20 home runs protecting me. I just try to do what I can to get on base for him so he can do the damage. Like you said, trying to be versatile, trying to do things that will help us win.

I feel like throughout our entire lineup, that's what it is, just a bunch of versatile hitters that can really handle the bat well.

Q. Ryan, obviously you bet on yourself and this team by transferring here. Was there a moment this season where you thought (indiscernible) in the SEC?

RYAN NICHOLSON: Yeah, I think first conference weekend against Georgia. I think that I was struggling early on out of conference and then just kind of worked on some things mechanically, and sometimes you've got to go back before you can go forward, and that weekend was a good kind of test to see, like all right, I had a good weekend, and let's just carry momentum into the next.

Georgia obviously is a really solid program, and it was good to kind of get my feet wet but also have a good start to conference play, and I think that propelled me pretty well.

Q. Ryan, you guys were picked to finish fifth in the preseason, and here you are. I wonder was that a rallying cry for you guys? Has that been something, a

little man kind of a thing all year?

RYAN NICHOLSON: I think we're just looking to get chips on our shoulder any chance we can get. We see all the media and a lot of people talk about how we play or how we're unorthodox or this, that and the other. But we just try to stay on our own guys, just go out there and win ballgames really.

Q. What's your take on that?

MITCHELL DALY: I never believed it. That's for sure. Seeing what we had in the locker room, I never believed it.

Q. It's not something you guys focused on?

MITCHELL DALY: No, not at all.

NICK MINGIONE: That's one of the beauties of this team is, with all due respect, we're at our best when we're just focused on doing what we can control, and really we can't control what you or anybody else think or say. We have no control over that. These guys are at their best, focus their time, effort and energy on things they can control like the way they go about their practice, the way they go about their schoolwork, the way they go about their diets, the way they go about the teammates they are, by the way they compete on the field. They have control over that, and that's one thing they've been awesome at.

That's just another good example of it.

Q. Ryan, a lot of kids come from the portal, looking for a fresh start. You had success at UC, so why was this the place for you, and was this something you had your eye on for a while?

RYAN NICHOLSON: It honestly wasn't. I loved my time at Cincinnati. I loved our coaching staff and all the relationships I've made there.

At the time there was a coaching change, and I thought that I would -- I had kind of a free opportunity to go into the portal, just kind of wait to see who they would hire, and I was just kind of waiting to see what would happen in the summer, and I got a lot of buzz, and then I kind of thought that being that a lot of my friends and teammates that I had gone in with were leaving with my class, I thought it would be a good opportunity just to kind of test and see what was out there, and a lot of people reached out, Coach Cousino being one of them, who I was already familiar with, and it just kind of lined up still close to home, my brother graduating here this year. Just made sense. I really loved the coaching staff, and once I thought that I was going to make the decision to come to UK, I was all in.

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Q. Nick, you've brought players in who have been in this position before. In football it's that first hit, you finally go, okay. How does that translate into baseball? How do you bring these guys back down to earth before the game?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, we actually talked about that in our pregame meeting today. We had a quote, and we started every one with a quote and how we were going to go on the attack and knock the door down. I also told them, hey, some of you will have some nerves. That's okay. That's different than being scared. There's a difference between having nerves and being scared. We will not be scared, with all due respect to our opponent and the enormity of the games.

But we're not going to play scared. We don't do that. But if you have some nerves, that's okay. You're doing something that's important. That's totally fine. But we made sure that we drew a line in the sand today before practice started. There's a difference between having nerves and being scared, and my team, we will not be scared. Have nerves, absolutely. But there's a difference. We made sure we covered that before practice today.

Q. What was the quote?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, there is a -- it was a quote from The Rock, okay, so I'd rather not go through the whole thing if you're okay with that. It was a quote from The Rock. We had two different guys animate it and live it out and with some emotion. Wasn't that awesome? It was fun.

Q. Who did the emotion?

NICK MINGIONE: Pat Herrera and Jackson Nove. They crushed it. They did awesome. No video. No, no video.

Q. Oftentimes these series come down to the tiny little microscopic things. What would you say is your X-factor?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, really, you bring up a really good point, and I talked about this earlier in the week about the margin of victory is so small. It is absolutely so small.

I just reminded our team today again before practice that we don't have to do anything different than we've done all year, and I would think their coach has a similar speech. We're in these positions because we've done some things right, and more times than not a lot of things right. Our formula starts with our pitching, our defense and our ability to grind out at-bats and have quality at-bats, and that's

where it starts.

We would not do anything different this weekend in that it would be exactly the same. That recipe is exactly the same.

Q. For Mitchell or Ryan, during the course of the league play, you're really familiar with a lot of guys that you're facing with, probably know the ins and outs of how they approach pitching you. What's it like preparing for a team like Oregon State who you're not overly familiar with, something akin to cramming for a test?

RYAN NICHOLSON: I wouldn't say cramming for a test. I think it's more just like -- I'm not sure I want to take this one.

MITCHELL DALY: I think that's the beauty of it. I think, like you said, that's a lot of familiarity with a lot of the teams that we play, whether we played them early in the season or during conference play, and then you see them a lot in Hoover so we're very familiar with each other. I think the cool part is they're not very familiar with us, too, and that's the challenge that goes into the scouting, the preparing that Coach Minge and the rest of the coaching staff do such a good job of preparing us so we feel confident and prepared going into it.

I think everybody is looking forward to that challenge of seeing fresh faces across from us that we don't really know too much about. We're looking forward to that.

Q. Nick, you've always gone out of your way to credit the crowd, the support of Big Blue Nation. Why does that play into your success so much?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, you've heard me say a ton that I want to do things that have never been done before, and for whatever reason, I just maybe view myself as a builder. I think you know this, I would think, but I think one of my spiritual gifts is the gift of encouragement. I can tell you that there's been a lot of time, effort and energy and intentional effort have gone into everything we've done, from the way we have little kids stand on the field with our players for the National Anthem, the way our players literally go in the stands and meet the fans right there, face to face, after the game. We don't put the barrier of the net in the way.

It's been very intentional the way we've gone about everything. We have given them access. We have done fan days. We have visited children's hospitals. We've been to the veterans' hospital. We have over the course of time since I've been here, we've even delivered season

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tickets to our fans. My first two years that's what we did. We went out and met the fans and gave them their season tickets and introduced ourselves and invited them to come to the park, so everything we've done has been intentional.

When you're trying to build something, what I've realized is people with us, they want to have a personal connection, and I believe in these guys so much. I believe in Mitchell Daly. I believe in Ryan Nicholson. I believe in our team with all my heart. There is no skeletons in the closet. We are an open book. It's the way I like to live, with nothing to lose, nothing to hide and nothing to prove but just build relationships. We're called to love God and love people, and that's what we do.

For us to thank them, to have them make sure they know how appreciated they are, it is, because we're trying to build something to where every year that someone goes, man, hey, what are we doing on a Friday night in April or May, let's go watch the Cats play, and it becomes part of the rhythm, and Lexington, Kentucky, in the state of Kentucky, you know this, it has a track -- not only record, but it has a rhythm to it. It has a rhythm to it. You know, we all know what happens in March, and then we know April comes and it's Keeneland. Well, why can't Kentucky baseball be May and June and into -- so we're trying to kind of build our way and get into the rhythms of what this city and this state has been through for so many years, and that takes time.

If somebody doesn't feel appreciated, maybe they may not come back. But to hear myself and the players and everybody else thank them, I just think that goes a long way because when our hearts are filled with gratitude, that is us at our best, everybody, for whatever situation we're going through in life, it doesn't matter, practice, game. When we can find the way to find the good in it and just be thankful, through the good and the bad, through the hard times and the great times, I think people appreciate that. That's how I want our players to be, and that's how I want to be.

Q. Mitchell and Ryan, could you speak on building that connection with the fans from y'all's perspective?

RYAN NICHOLSON: Yeah, I mean, I think it's massive to where our program wants to be in the future. You look at some of these programs around our conference, Mississippi State, Ole Miss, LSU, those are probably the most fun environments to play in, and why can that not happen here.

We're trying to create those environments, and I feel like everyone this season is witnessing the middle of that, of it started last year, creating that buzz, and we're trying to

basically keep that going and pick it up and move it forward, and next year we're going to try again to pick it up and move it forward.

MITCHELL DALY: To build off that, too, what Coach was saying, I think that the fans are starting to feel that family, that connection. They see us playing with, they see the love that we have for each other, and I really hope and pray that they feel like they're a part of that, because they are.

A lot of what they do and the energy they bring helps us, and when Coach talks about serving others, I hope they can see that, so we're thankful for them, and we're looking forward to -- the energy that they brought last weekend and the weeks leading up to this has been amazing. We're just excited to see what's in store for this weekend, too.

Q. It felt like Johnny Hummel wasn't quite as sharp down the stretch as he was early in the season. Where is he at?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, he's in a really good spot, and I think as you know, boy, did we lean on him a lot early. When you lean on him a lot early, sometimes the weather plays a factor in that because sometimes it can be a little chilly and it's a little harder to get loose and it's harder to get back out there for another inning. We relied on him heavy early, but I feel really good about where he's at physically now. He's well-rested, his stuff is super sharp, so we're in a good spot.

The reason why we had him ready to rock and roll is because we believed in him, and it was just Cam was just throwing the ball so well, and he was not getting good swings and takes, so we just decided to keep going with Cam. But we feel and have the utmost confidence in Johnny.

Q. You guys have talked about building the culture, setting this program up for the future. If you guys had to give a pitch to a player in the future to come here, why would a player come here?

MITCHELL DALY: So personally, this place is something that I've never really experienced before, not only in my time in college but just my time growing up. The environment that Coach has set, talking about serving others and making that such a priority, about how can you help your teammate today, how can you help the person next to you, how can you make someone feel appreciated in your life, like a family member or a friend. I think that truly sets you up just to grow as yourself as a person, even before a player. To grow in your faith, to become a better man, to become a better friend.



I think it's been huge on how that translates to the field, as well, because when you grow as a person, it's really interesting; you just start finding yourself more as a player, too.

So it's been an awesome experience here, and if anybody has struggled like me, I didn't really know who I was for the past couple years. If anybody is struggling like that and trying to become more themselves, then this is the place for you.

RYAN NICHOLSON: How would you feel doing something that hasn't been done before here? It's pretty plain and simple. Last I checked, Kentucky hasn't gone to Omaha yet. They've only been to three super regionals.

We're focused on the next game in front of us. I can tell the kid that's coming in next year that building success here, you'd be remembered for years and years to come, far past when you're done playing.

I think that speaks volumes to the fans and the Big Blue Nation that represents this program.

Q. Coach, if you could build off that a little bit, what has been the response to the type of season you've had?

NICK MINGIONE: These guys really, these two and that locker room, has really made our jobs dramatically easier.

I can tell you, I got a phone call tonight and the kid has already said, I want to come to Kentucky. I haven't talked to him yet. He's already told the other coaches, I want to be a Wildcat. I've watched your team play.

And this guy is a really good player, can really go anywhere he wants, but he's already watched the way they've played. He knows them. We've done all of our homework on his makeup, the type of people. There's four different people that we've done research on and what kind of person he is, and the video, watching him as a player is -- clearly he can play at this level. I haven't even talked to him yet. He's already said he wants to come to Kentucky. I haven't had to say one thing because Ryan Nicholson and Mitch Daly and the rest of these guys, they've said it all. They've done it. He's watched them.

So therefore I can tell you that the recruiting part has become easy. The evaluation part is still where we have to excel and we have to make sure we nail the details and continue to evaluate them and bring in the right players like these guys that can play at this level and have the right makeup and the right people that we're looking for because

there's so many good players in that transfer portal, so many. But they may not just all be right for Kentucky.

So our evaluate piece has to be spot on. We'll find out tonight if he's going to be a Wildcat or not. But it might take a couple phone calls to figure it out.

But we now have people that just -- they want to be here. This is where they want to be, and they've made it really clear, and it's because these guys and the rest of the guys and really our fans because a lot of players in this transfer portal, what do they want? They want to go somewhere they can win, they want to go somewhere where they can develop. That's what these guys have done. They've created it. We've won at a high level, and they're all getting better, every one of them. Ryan Nicholson has more home runs this year in the SEC than he did last year, no disrespect to where he came from. He came from a really good school and a great conference, but he's done better. Same thing with Mitch. These guys, they've just gotten better, and it's to their credit. They're making our jobs easier, and I'm thankful for that.

Q. I wonder who are some guys on the scouting report that jump out at you?

NICK MINGIONE: Appreciate you doing your homework. I'm not letting out any secrets until after the series.

Q. Do either one of you guys have a favorite Coach Minge quote?

NICK MINGIONE: I have a lot of shenanigans I'd say, so I'll be really curious to hear.

MITCHELL DALY: There's so many, probably just the "here we go," that one. No, seriously, I think one of the coolest ones that he says is "we don't talk about winning, we do what it takes to win," and that speaks volumes to what we prioritize here.

RYAN NICHOLSON: I second that, that or the "we don't move." I remember I moved a bunch before I came to school here. I did get hit with a bunch of baseballs. So stop moving.

Q. What did it mean to you all when he didn't move on that foul ball?

MITCHELL DALY: That's the cool part.

RYAN NICHOLSON: He stands by his words.

MITCHELL DALY: He practices what he preaches.



