

College World Series: Lexington Super Regional

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Kentucky Wildcats

Nick Mingione

Trey Pooser

Ryan Nicholson

Émilien Pitre

Postgame Press Conference

Kentucky 10, Oregon State 0

NICK MINGIONE: The guy to my left was amazing tonight. Picked the perfect time to throw one of his best games in a Kentucky uniform.

That lineup, I have so much respect for that coaching staff. That lineup is amazing. Through seven innings as you guys know, no earned runs. Had a couple walks, couple two-out walks; did not let it affect them. Just kept going.

Absolutely amazing performance by him and Jackson Nove. Our deal starts and ends with our pitching and defense and he got us going good, we defended at a super high level, and offensively we thought we did a really good job against their starter, who is an amazing pitcher. Amazing.

We scratched and clawed, did everything we could just to get three, and I thought we just waited it out, finally got our big inning in the seventh, including everything that we do offensively. Great night, thank you for the fans, unbelievable environment, unbelievable energy.

Just again, the gates open up and people are running to their seats. Pretty amazing, and we're very thankful.

Q. Trey, another quality start for you tonight; seven innings; just one hit; eight strikeouts. Since the regular season ended, 19 innings against Arkansas, Illinois, and then tonight in the postseason. Do you feel like you've taken a step up since the regular season ended?

TREY POOSER: Yeah, I feel like -- I don't know, I feel like



I've been trying to do the same thing; it's just worked out better for me honestly. That's pretty much it. I've just been doing the same thing I've been trying to do all season and it's just worked out a lot better for me this postseason.

Q. Trey, talk us through when you had one out, bases loaded and you guys only have a run at that time. You're facing really the heart of their lineup. Take us through that and how you got through and then you pitch a couple more innings?

TREY POOSER: Yeah, just trusting my stuff. I was trying to get a ground ball, trying to get a double play. Whatever I did I was just focused on throwing strikes and filling up the zone.

Q. How much focus did it take --

TREY POOSER: A lot.

Q. And then have to refocus?

TREY POOSER: That kind of threw me off for a second but I smiled and got back on there and Coach Roszel came out and had a good visit with me and told me to attack the zone, get back to what I was doing.

Q. You seemed to do a good job mixing your pitches tonight. Was that your game plan going in or did you fall into a rhythm and kind of get comfortable and confident in doing that?

TREY POOSER: Yeah, Coach Roszel called a great game, and he allows us to choose whatever we want to pitch. If we want to choose a different pitch we're allowed to, but I think he was calling a great game and switching it up just how we've been doing.

Q. Trey, some guys may hit a wall at this time of year, the arm may be feeling tired, but you look like you're getting stronger. What do you attribute that to?

TREY POOSER: Coach Jones our weight trainer. He gets us right in the weight room and then just staying on the same program and getting more running and lifting in and



just making sure my arm is right. The training room staff, also, they help as well.

Q. Trey, you obviously don't start the season in a weekend rotation. What was the moment this year where you realized, I'm an ace on an SEC team and that I can do this?

TREY POOSER: I wouldn't really say that I felt that I was an ace. I just felt like I was just another good addition to the starting rotation.

I think after the Ole Miss game maybe was when I felt like I really solidified the role or felt like I could go back out there and keep doing the same thing week after week.

Q. Ryan, you had a big night, went 3 for 5, one over the fence, one almost over the fence. Talk about how focused you are in this postseason and how confident you're feeling.

RYAN NICHOLSON: I think the focus really just goes to winning ballgames. I think especially in postseason, everything is magnified, adding pitch to pitch.

You really just separate everything and you really just hone in on that one single pitch and you slow your breathing down, and it's a lot of self-talk. But it's all about just, okay -- I mean, I'm not trying to hit a home run in that situation whenever it went off the wall.

Like there's a guy on third; with less than two I'm trying to get him in any way possible and get it done early. So that was really what I was trying to do there, and that's where the ball went. I was just happy to get the run in really.

Q. 10-O; it's the biggest win in UK history so far and it expires at midnight. How tough is it going to be to put that in the rearview mirror?

ÉMILIE PITRE: It's 9:35. It's two and a half hours, but we've been doing it all year long. We're going to come back out here tomorrow and attack like we've been doing all season long.

Q. You guys were up just 1-0 in the fifth and you delivered with the two-run double. How important do you think that was in shifting the momentum?

ÉMILIE PITRE: I think it was huge. Having Brian and Devo in between me he is huge. He is arguably one of the best hitters in the country in front of me, and Devo, who just grinds at-bats. Makes my job a lot easier. I got a curveball and didn't miss it.

Q. Your homer was kind of the dagger there, a nice scene and celebration afterwards. Can you describe that moment and what was going through your mind?

RYAN NICHOLSON: I don't think there was anything that I could really comprehend that was going through my mind other than this is pretty sweet.

But yeah, I was just lucky enough to get one out of there and go bridge, and then we look up at the board and we've got Nove going in and just had the utmost confidence of him going in there.

It's really just like, that was sweet. Cool. Just go out there and play defense now.

Q. Coach alluded to the fans out there tonight and the packed stadium. There was a few times they really got into it. Talk about what it means to have that fan base behind you and the scene that's been going on in Kentucky throughout this postseason?

TREY POOSER: It just keeps -- I mean, I don't know what inning it was, but they started doing the Blue-White chant, and that's the most I've heard it, because I think their fans started cheering or something like that, so then we started the Blue-White and it just kept getting louder and louder. Just helped push you in strikeouts. Like when we get 0-2 on a guy, whether you strike him out or not, they're still standing up for every pitch, clapping, and it's awesome.

It's cool to feel that.

RYAN NICHOLSON: I think it's cool on both sides of the ball. Obviously offensively it's great to have them behind us. I think defensively it's huge. I think it's almost like having an extra defender out there. They really can flip momentum. Poos a guy down the side and everyone is rowdy, and I think that momentum really helps fuel us to get some runs on the board offensively.

So definitely like the transitioning from defense to offense I think is massive, especially with our crowd.

Q. After you scored on the walk by Daly, did you kind of feel like you guys sped them up a little bit? After that there was a lot of small ball, a lot of bases, chaos play.

ÉMILIE PITRE: Yeah, definitely. That is the kind of baseball we play. We create chaos, whether it's on bases or on defense.

But yeah, definitely I felt like they were expecting it but not ready for it. I think that's what we do to teams. We shock



them whether it's on offense or defense?

Q. For either of the two hitters, it looked like you were chuckling during Trey's answers there. Can you describe what he's done today and throughout the season for you guys?

RYAN NICHOLSON: I forget who I was telling this to. He is like one of the best pitchers in the country that nobody knows about. He goes out there and he shows, and he doesn't really talk about it. He's not a boastful guy. He's all about the team.

But he just goes out there with a smile on his face, and he goes and gets outs for the guys behind him. And I think me and Petey, I think I can speak for Petey that we both love that.

ÉMILIE PITRE: Yeah. I think Coach Mitch would agree with me, that's what a Kentucky pitcher looks like.

NICK MINGIONE: Exactly. Thank you. Thank you.

ÉMILIE PITRE: It attacks, works really fast, and has a really slow heartbeat on the mound, and that's what we teach here.

Q. Trey, Bazzana is kind of their version of Ryan (indiscernible) at the top of the order there. Did a real nice job keeping them off the bases early. How big of a key was that to you when you approached your game plan?

TREY POOSER: Just try to focus on it as much as possible obviously, but just try to get the swing and miss. Obviously he didn't fall for some of the pitches he threw, but -- what did he do today? I don't know.

NICK MINGIONE: Grounded out; hit a hard ground ball his first at-bat and then the big one was with that runner at first base, and he lined out and he got a line-out and then you purged him out one time.

He hit two barrels. But you got him out.

TREY POOSER: There you go. Just try not to let him get the big swing off, I guess.

RYAN NICHOLSON: Did an awesome job of it.

NICK MINGIONE: You guys know this, but you've heard me talk about Pete over and over, and he's as good a player as I've coached.

You guys all know this, but he truly impacted the game

today in every single possible way. I don't know if you guys remember in the second inning they hit the big hop ground ball and he ran straight in and had to throw the ball on a weird angle.

Do you guys remember that play? That was an unbelievable play. He drew two walks, he had a huge RBI, hit in the middle of the field, he stole a base, and he scored on a bunt. It was by inches. He literally impacted the game on every level. He did everything. Everything.

I've been watching this for two straight years. The guy is an amazing baseball player.

Ryan Nicholson is just -- I don't know if you guys -- he impacted the game on the defensive end. I don't know if you remember the hard hit ball to his right where he speared it.

Ryan, talk about a slow heart rate; that dude has a slow heart rate. These two guys don't show a ton of emotion. Nicholson will give you a little more. You've just got to earn it from him. If you earn it, he'll give it to you.

But Ryan, I told you guys this; it's one of the two major things that's happened to our team and why we've done so good offensively, is because of what he's been able to do.

It started in that Georgia series and the guy has not looked back. He has gotten big hit after big hit after big hit, and he's been super clutch.

And Poos, Ryan, he said that really well: He's like the best pitcher nobody knows about. Because he's so unselfish. He does nothing to draw attention to himself. All he does is make pitch after pitch, and he? Smiles when something doesn't go wrong.

And I'm just telling you, you have real toughness. If you can stand on the mound, and that mound can be a lonely place where everybody is watching you. When something doesn't go your way, the guy just sits there and just smiles, and he shakes his head and he goes on to the next thing.

He is exactly what Pete said. He's exactly what a UK pitcher looks like, and he executes at a super high level.

This night would be totally different if it wasn't for these three men, and we had others, but ooh, unbelievable performances by all three.

Q. You've given up one run in the last three tournament games. Talk about hitters feeding off each other, do pitchers feed off of each other?



NICK MINGIONE: You know, you've heard me talk over and over about Pete. He's so smart. He is so smart. What he said about Poos is like, that's what a Kentucky pitcher looks like.

We have a pitching identity that we truly believe in, and we're supposed to work fast, we're going to throw low strikes, we're going to control the running game. But Mason and the guys before him, that is us at our best.

And coach Roszel has called an unbelievable -- the last four games he has been unbelievable with the game he's called, and he's had our guys ready.

There is momentum that builds. We often talk about showing the roadmap. It needs -- someone needs to be able to step up and show what it's supposed to look like. We talk a lot about our pitching staff and how they look. The behavioral piece is so important to us. We've had a lot of guys do it at a high level.

For us to do what we want to do, that's what has to happen. You guys have heard me say over and over that's where it starts. It starts on the mound for us. We've had a lot of guys, and I give Coach Roszel a lot of credit. He has just had these guys ready to go; and give the players the credit for executing.

Q. Singling out the bullpen, Nove comes in tonight, two innings, strikes out four of the six guys. Cam O'Brien last week; Robert Hogan the game before that. How big have those guys been?

NICK MINGIONE: They've been unbelievable. It doesn't matter -- you guys have heard me say this before -- but the most important pitcher is the guy on the mound at that time.

It doesn't matter who it is or what role. Every inning and every pitch matters. I will say this: I don't know if you guys have seen this, it would be hard to miss because I have recruits telling me this, but Devin Burkes has been unbelievable. There are times where I feel like he is willing our pitchers to make something happen. He's willing them.

His nonverbal communication, his verbal communication, and then the guys on the infield have really played a role in that, too.

At the end of every game, I always give the team opportunities to speak, and if they have anything that they want to share, and they often talk about our infielders. They talk about Mitch Daly being in their ear, Grant Smith being in their ear, Pete, Ryan Nicholson, Devin. There really is a nine-versus-one mentality. But there's guys,

their verbal and nonverbal communication is off the charts.

When you have a bunch of guys pulling on the same rope trying to execute the same thing, it's worked out well for us.

Q. Trey talked about it a little bit, but in the fifth inning there, the hit-by pitch and the error, how is he able to slow the heart rate down and get out of that, because that's impossible spot?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, let's walk through that. I thought he got the guy first and got the come-backer, and he threw it away. Okay?

Then they attempted to bunt, and they didn't get the bunt down and he ended up striking him out, and it rolled back to the top.

Now they have one of the greatest players in all of college baseball up. He pitched him tough and he ended up walking him, so now we've got the bases loaded. So here we go again. I asked our team this, what did we need in that moment? We needed a punch-out, and he got the strike out.

And then he got the ground ball out.

It was to Daly who threw him out at second. It was just that moment in the game where it comes time where you have to make pitches, and he did it at the highest level. He landed multiple pitches, threw his fastball to different spots, and threw two different off-speed pitches in those sequences to get the three outs.

That was a huge moment in the game. That was the opportunity that we needed to put our foot down and stop the bleeding, and sure enough, he did.

Q. Both you and Ryan said Trey is the best pitcher nobody is talking about. Since he didn't start in the rotation did you also not know he was this good early on?

NICK MINGIONE: I've been wrong a lot. I've been wrong a lot. But I would tell you that we're not surprised because if you think about -- early in the year we do something that we started a handful of years ago, and we piggyback pitchers.

So early in the year, because of weather and other factors, and we want to protect our guys to get them to the end of the year, so we piggyback guys. So that means on Friday we already know who the first two guys that are going to throw are and we build up their pitch counts.

So we would throw Travis first; we always came in with Pooser right behind him. We piggyback them because we felt like at the time those were the two best arms that we had for that day, and we liked how they mixed and matched and they played off of each other.

So we really did throw him on Friday nights. We threw him on Fridays because we knew how good he was.

Now, did I know he was going to end up being a starter and being 7-1, I would not have predicted that because we didn't know what was going to happen with Travis.

But boy, has he taken an unbelievable opportunity and just ran with it.

Q. How important is it to get through the first game of the super regional?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, that was big. That was big, especially because guys -- I have so much respect for this coaching staff, and this team is amazing. They're a really good team. Tomorrow will not be easy. These guys are competitive. They're tough. They know how to win. Everybody. You just go through that lineup, and you just look.

But for us to use two guys, I thought that was big because when we're at our best, this has been our formula, is our starters. Much like them, that's how they're built. Their starters just go and go and go. Anytime you can use two guys in a game, that is absolutely crucial and helps set us up for the next two days.

Q. You said that your approach is you've got until midnight tonight and then tomorrow it's back to work. Tomorrow you're probably sitting at this podium after midnight. Talk about the late start or how that changes preparation for tomorrow?

NICK MINGIONE: That's so funny you bring that up because the guys asked me that this week when they announced -- something we do with the team is I call it -- we talk about the elephant in the room.

I always want to have an open line of communication with the players. Anytime we communicate very highly going into regionals about what's at stake, I make sure that they know, hey, even with the SEC, going into the last weekend I just put all the cards on the table and said, hey, if we do? This and this and this, this is what will what will happen. If this team does this and this, this is what will happen. This is who will be champions. This is who won't.

We just lay it all out and then we say, okay, we're not

talking about that anymore. We're going to focus on what it takes to win, okay? Well, when those times came out, I said, does anybody have any questions. Do we need to talk about anything, I explained to them 9:00 p.m., West Coast team, ton of respect, viewership, everything, whatever I thought was the reason why.

I don't remember who it is. I can find out eventually because I know you're going to ask. I know you're going to ask. One of the guys raised their hand like, Coach, what if we win on Sunday, it's after midnight? Can we celebrate?

And I said, I need to think about that. I was like, if that happens, I'll discuss and talk to the staff, and we may need to add an extension and some time, and if that happens and we go to Omaha, we'll put ourselves and Omaha time, and I might give you, you might have 45 minutes.

I was like, but we're going to move on because our goal is not just to make it to Omaha; our goal is to be what, all said national champions. They asked about that.

We just covered it with the team. I made sure that I did not want them to lay around all day. I asked them to go for walk and get out. I asked, hey, do I need to set a time where you guys need to come here so you're not laying around and sleeping all day, and they said, no, Coach, we got it.

I can tell you this, that this is a group of men that I just trust, and I believe they'll do the right thing.

They're going to get a good night's rest. They're already eating Puccini's. That's what we have for the team meal, and they're going to eat and show up tomorrow and try to do something that's never been done.

Q. You mentioned how amazing that lineup is. They rank in the top 10 in so many categories. Can you explain how incredible the pitching performance from your whole staff to shut out a team like that for the first time this year?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, that's why I just -- Trey, I can't say it enough. He was magnificent. I don't know any other words. You guys can think of some. Because ooh, those are good players in that other dugout. They know how to win. Their coaches, they're awesome. To do that is not easy. It's not easy.

But it takes everybody. I thought he was great, Nove was great. As I mentioned, Coach Roszel, our defense. Pete made a great play, I thought Grant made a good play going to his right, had some good carry on his throw. James made two good plays on the line drive down the line and



then the high pop-up where he had to run in. Waldy's play was awesome.

Against their lead-off hitter, they had a guy -- it's about to get over his head, he sat on it initially, the ball just took off because of how strong he is, and he made that play and he ended the inning.

But we needed all of those plays. We needed them all. It was a special, special performance on the mound, as good of one as we've had all year.

Q. Kind of an odd situation with the pitch that went behind Nolan and now here come the warnings and y'all had some long discussions because when you guys get your run you don't play, you're not allowed to be there tomorrow night. Can you tell us what you discussed?

NICK MINGIONE: The ball went behind him, and both teams got warnings. They did that just to try to calm the situation. I don't think he tried to hit him. I really don't. I don't think he would do that, especially in this environment in that situation. So the umpires just wanted to make sure nothing else happened, and I thought they did a good job of settling both teams down.

Q. I know it's far from the ultimate goal, but you talk about things you've never done before, it's the first super regional in program history. Is that something you acknowledged postgame that you have to appreciate, something you guys have never done?

NICK MINGIONE: I didn't even know that. Yeah, we went 0-2 the last two. They've got two hours and six minutes. I'm thankful. It just means we're one step closer to where we want to be.

You don't do that without amazing players. I thought our coaches were great. I told you about Coach Roszel. I thought Ammo did an awesome job, creating all kinds of havoc and pressure there in the seventh, all those runs.

That inning had legitimately everything that we like to do. It had home run, it had home run, it had a bunt, it had stolen bases, it had wild pitches. It was everything.

It's one thing to execute. It's another thing to call it. Coach Ammo had the courage and guts to call a lot of those plays, and give the players credit. They executed it at a super, super high level. We just got a lot of production up and down our lineup, too. When you think about how many different guys scored a run, we had eight of the nine guys in our lineup score a run, and even Grant Smith down there at the bottom scored two runs, and James was 4 for

4 in quality at-bats.

It was just a total, total team effort. Everybody contributed to our offense tonight. Everybody. That's a good pitching staff, too. There's a lot to be said. I've talked and complimented how well they are offensively, but boy, they can really pitch.

I think that starter -- is he draft eligible next year? I mean, this guy, he's going to be able to pitch for a really long time. He's a really good pitcher.

Q. We saw that your team didn't have as much celebration at the end of the regionals as we had seen the year before. You talked about your extremes last year, you guys going 0-2. How does it help you having these older guys, having that experience last year, seemed a little calmer after this first win tonight. Talk about how that helps you and the different mentality this year as opposed to last year?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, I've said this before, but it just helps to have guys that have been there and done that before. Really the first time I ever learned that, I played my college baseball at Embry-Riddle in Daytona Beach, and Coach Greg Williams gave me an opportunity of a lifetime where he allowed me to come and be his volunteer coach in 2003.

Well, in 2003 we made it to the College World Series. We had some guys back on that team. So in 2004 we made it to the College World Series again. Then in 2005 we returned some of those guys, and we made it to the College World Series again, three years in a row, and we actually played for the national championship in '05, the NAIA World Series, and we ended up losing.

But it just taught me the importance of having guys that have been there and done that and how much that helps. That's what we have right now. We have a core group of guys, pitchers and positional players both, that have been there and done that.

So therefore their goals have changed, and they want to do something that's never been done.

Q. You touched on it briefly, but proud program, a lot of great players in that other dugout. To a man, each one of them came up before you guys were on and said we're going to respond, we're going to fight. Do you anticipate the second game of this being one of the hardest games of your season?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, with how much respect I have for Oregon State and their players and their coaches, I fully



expect every game to be competitive, whether that's this one or if it even goes to a third one. The teams that are left right now are really tough and good baseball teams.

I fully expect tomorrow to be an absolute dogfight. That's what I expected today, and that's what I expect for the rest of the year because obviously this is what it comes down to, everybody is fighting to do something.

They'll be fighting to keep their season alive, and we're fighting to go to Omaha, and if it doesn't work out tomorrow, then we'll be fighting to keep our season alive check on Monday.

I fully expect it to be a dogfight, and it will not be easy. I do know that, because of how good a team that Oregon State is.

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