

2022 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Northwestern Wildcats
Coach Kate Drohan

Rachel Lewis

Jordyn Rudd

Maeve Nelson

Postgame Press Conference



I think we believed it the whole year, and we believed it in that game that anybody could do it, and that we were going to step up and we were going to get it done however we could.

Q. I just want to ask you about Michelle Gascoigne. It's a familiar area for her coming back. What has her impact been on this staff over the years?

KATE DROHAN: Michelle is tremendous. She's a tremendous teacher of the game, right? I'm not just talking about as a pitching coach. She impacts all parts of our program, and she's just -- her wealth of knowledge around the game with her experience playing and also in the pro league has been tremendous for us. That's one part of it.

The second part of it is she's an amazing woman. She's a tireless worker. She really believes in our system. She really believes in our women. It's just tremendous the impact she's had on our program here.

Q. Coach, Danielle, she's been incredible to get you guys here, but she also has pitched by far the most innings of anyone here at the World Series. When you are looking to how Oklahoma is going to game plan and having all that film, is there a concern that they're renowned for being able to game plan and make those adjustments that there's so much exposure this year?

KATE DROHAN: There's been a lot of talk about Danielle and her pitches. I think anyone inside of our program really understands what a warrior she is and really what she's done to prepare herself for this moment.

The thing that I really like about our team is that we know who we are. We know what we're good at. We're going to take the field, and we're going to give everything we have and battle.

We'll be prepared. We've played a lot of high-level games, and we'll be prepared for it, and we'll give it our best.

Q. Coach, I know before the year you and I talked, and you had a lot of enthusiasm about this team. You just

THE MODERATOR: This is the pre-tournament press conference featuring the Northwestern Wildcats. Northwestern is making its sixth Women's College World Series appearance after having defeated Arizona State in the Tempe Super Regional. We are joined by head coach Kate Drohan, student-athletes Rachel Lewis, Jordyn Rudd, and Maeve Nelson. If you could start us off, Coach, and tell us about the Wildcats' journey to Oklahoma City.

KATE DROHAN: Well, first, I would like to say thank you for the great welcome we've received from Oklahoma City and everyone involved with the NCAA and everyone involved here at the stadium. It's been a great experience, so thanks for so much for that.

It's been really fun coaching this team this year. They're an incredible group of women who have worked really, really hard. I'm honored to take the field with them, and especially these last few weeks it's been -- we've been tested in a lot of ways, and I'm really proud of our toughness to get to this moment.

With that, we're excited to just attack here one game at a time.

THE MODERATOR: Rachel, you can call them the Cardiac Cats, the Comeback Cats, whatever you want to call them. Down 5-0 in that third game against ASU. What is it in you guys' DNA that allowed you to come back and win that game?

RACHEL LEWIS: I think we've been relentless all year, and we weren't going to go down in that way. We weren't going to lay down and die. We wanted to leave it all on the field, and that's what we did.



mentioned some of the things, the ups and downs of the year. Has that enthusiasm maintained throughout the season? Has it kind of come and gone? Can you talk about that a little bit?

KATE DROHAN: Sure. Here's the deal. When anyone asked me before the season about our team, I said I think we're going to be a good team. We have a chance to be special.

So when we hit those hard moments throughout the season -- and we really challenged this group in terms of the schedule we played, the venues we played in. We were very purposeful in doing that so that our team could learn these lessons along the way.

Each time we were challenged, I was so impressed and in awe with how our team responded, their composure, their openness and willingness to learn. And I think the way I would describe this team right now is even from yesterday to today, the growth mindset of, okay, how can we get a little bit better at this. I think that's what we've really kind of leaned on throughout the year, and that's what sustained us for sure.

Q. Maeve, you have beaten UCLA, Clemson, Washington, Oregon this year. How did those wins or just playing in those games help to prepare you for this situation?

MAEVE NELSON: I think those are some really tough competition games, and the only way you can really come out of all those games with victories or with experience from those games is uniting together as a team, and we really came together.

I think what's really special about this group is our authenticity with each other and our vulnerability with each other, and Kate keeps saying to us too that that translates on to the field, and that allows us to be really gritty in those moments that you saw over the weekend that our authenticity with each other allows us to be gritty and come back from a 5-0 deficit.

I think those wins really show just how we can come together as a group and how we're prepared for this moment and this game for tomorrow.

Q. Maeve, I think you're from Greater Chicago, and I've been around a long time. I've seen Northwestern come in here four times, DePaul come in here four times. I remember Illinois Chicago came once. What is it about Chicago that produces such good softball and softball resources? It's not a Sun Belt place, not a coastal place. What is it about the Chicagoland that produces

in cold weather such great softball?

MAEVE NELSON: I think that's a great question. I think there's a lot of really great softball programs around. I played for the Oak Park when I was growing up, and I learned a lot. And a lot of the people I grew up with playing on this really small travel team ended up playing at really high-level schools.

I think there's a lot of great resources. And even as I was growing up, we came to Northwestern camps since I was 12 years old.

The resources you're able to capitalize on, whether that's going to Northwestern or all the really great coaches, whether they're Bandits from back in the day, or now they're AU Pro, coaches that you can take lessons from. There are a lot of great resources that I have capitalized on myself since I was a little kid.

Q. Jordyn, I'm going to address this one to you. I saw you guys at the start of the year and obviously now in the postseason. What do you feel like are the biggest differences between Northwestern in Game 1 and Northwestern in Game 3 against Arizona State? How do you feel like the team has adapted the most through the year?

JORDYN RUDD: I feel like our team has done really well just learning to love each other even more throughout the entire season, and I think really learning from each other's at-bats and how to better ourselves every single game, and I think competing every game has really helped us.

Q. Rachel, you were named the Big Ten Player of the Year. Obviously, a very special honor. You've had a little time to reflect on that. Obviously, you haven't really been thinking about that, but what does that mean to you and to the program at Northwestern?

RACHEL LEWIS: I think it means a lot, and I think the Big Ten has grown a lot over the past few years, and it's really cool to see the competitiveness just continue to increase over the years.

I think it was always a goal of mine to be at the top, and however I could do that, and I think my team obviously had a huge part in that.

Just the growth over the past few years that we've had as a team is really special, and for that to happen this year, I think it was really cool. But I'm just really honored to be able to have that title now. I think, yeah, I haven't had much time to reflect on it because we've been so focused on just winning games. That's what we're going to

continue to do.

Q. Kate, you guys were clearly going to make the NCAA field. You didn't have to worry about it on selection night, but you talked about your scheduling. How much do the Big Ten coaches talk about how to schedule, what to schedule, and how to manipulate the RPI so you don't get left out on the wrong side of the selections, those kinds of things?

KATE DROHAN: As a conference we talk about it a lot. Where you go play, who you play against, top 10, top 25, top 50. I mean, we're constantly talking about it as a group of coaches to build that really competitive, really effective nonconference schedule. Then this year we've even gone to a very specific conference schedule that's a little bit more RPI-based as well.

That I think worked very, very well for us. If you ask me about last year, I think there were some really good Big Ten teams that were left out of the tournament I think that deserved a shot at it.

This year we had the most ever teams from our conference in the postseason. It's something that we have to think about and that we're talking about, and I think we're going in a great direction.

Q. A follow-up. What did you do inside the conference schedule to bolster the RPI?

KATE DROHAN: It's kind of like a rotating schedule. So it's like a third. A third of it is geography, a third of it is your rivals and all that good stuff and a little bit random, and then a third is RPI-based.

The teams that finished in the top of the league the year before, they plan to have them face each other the next year. You're just constantly working on having the best teams play the best teams every year.

Q. Kate and Jordyn, I'm hoping you can both address this. Obviously, you want to get off to a good start at the Women's College World Series, and that won't be easy given that you are playing a team like Oklahoma, but do you almost look at it as we've got nothing to lose? Almost everyone counts us out. What's the attitude when you are taking on a team like that in their home state tomorrow?

JORDYN RUDD: I think it's about going out there and being ourselves more than anything. I think that's worked for us all year, and I think nothing changes when you get here. It's the same game. It's the same everything. We're just going to play with each other and play the game that

we know how to play.

KATE DROHAN: So I think every single game at the World Series is hard regardless of who you're lining up with first game or Game 3 or otherwise.

I think the thing that we're preparing for as a team that's unique to our match-up with Oklahoma will be the fans. So we're trying to just prepare our team, what that will be like during the game, and to really help them and strategize with our team to focus on what's happening between the lines.

Q. This is for Kate. Kind of following up on Barry's first question earlier. In 2006-2007 you had a lot of local and regional kids. You have a lot of local and regional kids now. How much has that landscape, the recruiting landscape, the travel ball landscape regionally changed in those 15 years?

KATE DROHAN: I think it's just gotten better and better. When you are thinking about the number of elite-level, high-level Division I softball players coming out of the Chicagoland area, you know, and our neighboring states in the Midwest, it's just tremendous the growth that I have seen at the youth level, both at high school and in travel ball.

And it's phenomenal, what we're able to do all year-round with some of the facilities that have been built, but also just the interest and the really amazing young girls who are investing so much in the sport.

I would say in the last 15 years it's just grown even more.

Q. This question is for Rachel. Coach touched on it a little bit earlier about Oklahoma having a large number of fans come to OKC. How are you all going to try to kind of stay away from the noise and keep within yourselves?

RACHEL LEWIS: I think we have been preparing for this all year, and we've played in a few I'll call it hostile environments, and it's been fun. We've loved it. We've soaked it up.

I think especially this past weekend we just really had to reel it in on Sunday and focus on each other and what was happening with our team, and that's what we're going to continue to do.

Q. This is to anybody that wants to answer this, but the last time Northwestern was here was in 2007. Can you talk about the impact this has on the program and also how the alumni reached out to you and the fan

base, the support system has just grown and backed you on this trip?

KATE DROHAN: Wow. I can't even begin to explain to you the support we've received from the women who have played before this group, and it didn't start just this week. We felt it from the start of the season, and it's been such a boost for our -- I know it's been very meaningful, and they'll speak to that, but it's been awesome.

We're going to have a great group here tomorrow cheering us on, and we're so honored to share this experience with them.

We talk about this is our sixth trip here, and it's been so cool for me to witness, and through Sharon Drysdale, who will also be here tomorrow, and how those generations of women have remained connected over the years and how meaningful that is to the program.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for your time. We appreciate it. Best of luck.

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