

# 2022 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, June 1, 2022  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**Florida Gators**

**Coach Tim Walton**

**Skylar Wallace**

**Charla Echols**

**Hannah Adams**

Postgame Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: This is the pre-tournament press conference featuring the Florida Gators. The Gators advanced to the World Series after defeating Virginia Tech. We are joined by head coach Tim Walton and student-athlete Skylar Wallace. Coach, if you could just start us off and tell us a little bit about the Gators' journey to OKC.

TIM WALTON: Yeah, this is No. 11 for me and our program, and really excited to be here. Thank you to the NCAA, ASA Hall of Fame and city of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma for hosting this event. We're really excited to be here.

It's a different journey. We've been here ten previous times through Gainesville, Florida, and to pack our bags and to get on the road and head to Blacksburg and go in and win, and not only win but to win the way we did, and to be able to handle the adversity and the road travel and all the fun things that go with being on the road, this is an exciting time for us.

We've got a young crew. We only have six players that have been to the World Series before, Skylar being one of them in a different uniform.

Really looking forward to this opportunity for our program, our entire program, our future programs and for all of our families to get a chance to be able to be spectators and root for the Gators here in Oklahoma City.

Really thankful to be here, and looking forward to watching our athletes compete on the stage that they've set forth as goals, ambitions, and dreams in their life. Really excited about being here.

THE MODERATOR: Skylar, Coach Walton talked about in Game 1 of the series against Virginia Tech, that it's not about the game, it's about the series, and you were getting at-bats that would hopefully advance you further. What is it about the Florida culture that allowed you guys to believe? It's one thing to say it, but you guys obviously believed it and came back and won Games 2 and 3. What is it about Florida that allowed you to do that?

SKYLAR WALLACE: I think one thing about Florida culture is that we don't dwell on the past. Every day you go out there, you try I to get better and do the best that you can to win a ball game.

So, unfortunately on Friday we didn't do what we wanted to do, and our intentions weren't there the right way, but we came back on Saturday different. We reviewed scouts, what we were seeing as hitting, what the pitchers were throwing, all of that, and kind of reviewed it and just made a better plan to get after it the next day and try to win as a team and just really move forward and get another chance to win.

THE MODERATOR: Now we are joined also by student-athletes Hannah Adams and Charla Echols. Thank you for joining us.

**Q. Tim, you obviously know what a championship team looks like. What are some of the characteristics that this team has that is similar to those '14, '15 national championship teams and maybe what makes this team unique?**

TIM WALTON: You know, it's really hard when you start -- when you do this as long as I do, everything is a comparison. You compare the goods to the bad, a lot of different things.

I think one of the things that this team really embodies, just the "team" word, the chemistry on the field, the chemistry in our work ethic and just the constant ability to communicate with each other the right way, push each other and lead not only by example, but also lead with some encouraging and sometimes discouraging words. You have to be honest



and accountable.

I think this team embodies that. It's really hard to -- when you start looking at the players up here, they're all so unique. This is a down year for the Gators, and here we are in Oklahoma City. This is a down year for Charla Echols, and she's hitting .300 with 50-some RBIs, and how the heck is that a down year for anything? How is this a down -- the expectations that we have and that our fans have and people around the country have for the Gators is really high.

I think this team early on didn't embrace that. I think we struggled with that a little bit because of the expectations and the constant words out of our team and the constant words out of our -- maybe my mouth was just, hey, it doesn't matter where we're at. Where do you guys want to go and how do we get there? I think we just really started creating a road map to get there.

Charla started getting hits. Even though she hit the ball pretty solidly all season long, she started getting hits.

Skylar, obviously, in my opinion, had probably one of the best seasons in Division I softball history if you look at the statistics top to bottom in every category: triples, doubles, home runs, inside the park home runs, stolen bases, positions played. She played more positions than probably any of the All-Americans that suited up on this field.

I think there's a lot of cool things. Hannah Adams, her injury set us back, but it also propelled us in a way that I have never seen one person impact a team.

There's a lot of similarities between these guys. I think the biggest key for me is these three on this stage and the ones in the locker room, they're really embracing being competitors.

Cheyenne Lindsey's hit against LSU on the road was the biggest hit we had in the season, and it really embodied the words of, hey, don't worry about what you have done. Let's just figure out -- I tell Charla all the time: Don't tell me what you can't do. Show me what you can do.

Cheyenne got that big hit, and, boom, got Hannah back the next week, and really things started to take off for us.

**Q. Coach, the Gators can be the top ranked team. They can be 16. They can be a 4 seed in a regional. Not that that would ever happen. No matter where you are ranked or seeded, when Florida gets to the postseason, it's just you never can count Florida out. What is it about your program, your culture, et cetera, that that's the case?**

TIM WALTON: I think there are so many people that get caught up in things that are out of their control when you get to postseason. Umpires, fans, weather, delays.

I think that we've done a good job of being able to really roll with that. These guys are pretty resilient. We've had so many delays this season. We had to play at Ole Miss, and it was Easter weekend, so we're already playing a Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and the next thing you know, we have bad weather, so we played a double-header.

I think 33 hours later we already completed three games. These guys didn't bat an eye. We jumped on a plane and went back home and got after it again.

I think for us it's just understanding how to deal with the expectations, and I think that I put as much pressure on these guys. We had a moment in Texas A&M where we won the game, but we played awful. We played terribly. It wasn't just what the standard should and would look like.

So we had a long conversation after the game, and we lost the next game. Got our butts kicked. We won the series, and we figured out how to really embrace just what postseason is going to feel like even though you're playing a midweek game, what postseason is going to feel like even though we're playing an orange and blue scrimmage.

I think these guys understand every time we go out on the field we go out hard every time and put a lot of pressure and emphasis on excellence and not necessarily the score.

**Q. Tim, you mentioned this being kind of a down year of sorts for you guys; yet here you are, the only SEC team that's here. I think that's fairly surprising that there's only one SEC team. Do you guys carry the flag for the league? Do you not? Just how do you see that?**

TIM WALTON: We're obviously in a very prideful league. It's a league of great coaches, great facilities, great athletic directors, great programs, great tradition-rich programs. I would be happy to carry the flag for everybody in the SEC.

We have a lot of really good teams and players. We have some really good teams in the SEC that aren't here. They weren't able to get through, whether it be a regional or super regional, through different moments.

I'll be happy to carry the flag. I think our kids -- there's a lot of kids that our kids have played with along the way that have a lot of respect for. Our league is one thing. Our coaches conversations that we have, I don't know what the other leagues do, but we don't bitch and complain. We try



to figure out what's good for the entire league and not just good for the Gators or good for one program.

I think we do a good job of coming together and collaborating on how to do what's best for our student-athletes, do what's best for your programs to try to get as many teams possible in Oklahoma City.

It didn't work out, but I'm thankful we're here. Commissioner Sankey sent me a text message, and he is an unbelievable leader. And what he has been able to give the coaches, the programs, our student-athletes, just from an experience standpoint, is second to none, and very proud of that.

**Q. For Hannah and Charla, just Tim has spoken about the being, quote, like a prisoner of expectations. Can we hear from you guys what it was like this year kind of, maybe especially at a time you are 11-11 and maybe fourth or fifth place in the SEC? But that's why you went to Florida, for the expectations, correct?**

HANNAH ADAMS: I think definitely that's why you come to Florida, to play for championships and to win SEC championships, go to the World Series.

At times I think the expectations can get to you, but I think this team has really embraced just taking it one game at a time and really not letting the last game affect our next game or our last at-bat affect the next at-bat. Just trying to embrace every single moment and not take anything for granted.

CHARLA ECHOLS: I think it's all about the team. Like you said, expectations, they are what they are, but as long as you have people beside you that you know they have your back through it all, you can get over yourself pretty quickly.

**Q. Tim, obviously, Oregon State, Mariah Mazon, what have you seen from her just watching games? She seems to have kind of carried them at the plate and as a pitcher?**

TIM WALTON: Yeah, obviously, especially on this stage, being a two-way star for a team is pretty -- it happens a lot in Oklahoma City, but it's very rare accomplishment to be a number three hitter with X amount of home runs and being clutch and then coming in in the circle and doing the same thing.

Pitching in the Pac-12, the teams top to bottom are solid. Her strike-outs-to-walk ratio is unbelievable. She's really good. She competitive. I don't know exactly what her year is, I didn't look at that, but she seems to be very seasoned and very mature.

She's done a good job, and obviously I saw enough film. And to be able to go into Knoxville and to go to Stanford and get a big hit and get a big W in the circle, she's really good.

One thing, she touches every spot in the zone. She doesn't just live on one pitch. She's got -- she features a repertoire that's pretty good, and it's difficult to sit on one pitch, but she looks really good.

**Q. Tim, you talked about the SEC coaches, you guys working together. How much do you talk about in the offseason scheduling and maximizing the RPI and setting sort of your agenda based on that?**

TIM WALTON: Our leadership has been really good. Byron Hatch just left as our sports supervisor for the SEC, and he is now with College Football Playoff System. He was a really good collaborator. He would connect us, whether we were in Colorado in the middle of the summer or California or wherever the championships are.

He has done a good job of kind of spearheading a little bit of current events and some things that are important, and then what is it going to look like when we add Oklahoma and Texas? What is it going to look like? What do we need to do in our scheduling process when we continue our 24-game schedule? Do we have sides, an east and a west? I think we've done some good things.

I think the biggest thing that I have learned in this chair is that the education process, what you think happens doesn't always happen. I think they've really done a good job as soon as Greg has taken over as the president and the Commissioner of our league, he has really put a lot more information on our plate to help us not only with the student-athletes' experience, but the championships, the RPI, all the different things the nuances.

We get so many updates on compliance issues and NILs and all the other stuff, but typically we get from the NCAA. We've had that in the SEC office. They've given us a month earlier about all the different current events. We do spend a lot of time talking about what's best for the entire game. Specifically what's best for the SEC teams.

**Q. For Tim: It's been a long time since you had Stacey Nelson throwing in 40 complete games a year when that was the norm for college softball. What stages have you gone through and kind of how you think about pitching, leading to how you utilize this particular group this season?**

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I was looking for you in here,



Graham. I was trying to find out where you were at. (Laughing).

I think it's funny. Don't get me wrong, I would rather have Stacey Nelson, one pitcher go out, you get the ball every single game. But we've been fortunate. We have a really good -- we have a young staff. We have some young kids. Elizabeth Hightower has done a phenomenal job being able to figure out how to get a win every single weekend. Lexie Delbrey has done a good job matching up as well.

I think the key for me is I have become -- we talk about our power. We talk about our speed. We talk about our defense. I've always become really more of a chameleon to what we have and what we're good at and how we're good at it.

Ultimately, when you have a championship-level team, you want to have a role for every single player on your team, and I think it's really important that I have learned how to use our parts.

Last weekend was Natalie Lugo's weekend, the weekend before that was Rylee Trlicek. The weekend before that was Rylee, Elizabeth, and Lexie.

I think ultimately we've really tried to find really what we're good at and maybe what we're not and figure out how to utilize and maximize. This year we have six pitchers and figure out what the best match-ups are. Last year, year before was Katie Chronister and maximizing her experience.

I think we've become a chameleon to finding a way, like the women up here said, that we're just trying to find a way to win a ball game. We're not worried about what Saturday looks like or Friday looks like. We're trying to figure out what it's going to take for us to win on Thursday, and then from there, we'll figure out the next day.

**Q. For Coach, speak to the growth of the state of Florida since, obviously, your first trip in the World Series in 2008. This year we had three teams in the state host a regional. UCF gets to a super regional for the first time. Florida State has done their thing. Even at the lower level, Division II and junior college just won national titles. What is it about the state of Florida, and you have seen the growth, that it's helped your program, obviously, get to this place?**

TIM WALTON: I quoted the great Steve Spurrier, the head ball coach, the other day on my social media feeds. Just really that we've older people moving to the state all the time to retire, and I think we've got a great thing in the state of Florida. We've got great weather. We've got great

sports. We've got great education.

Why wouldn't you at 18, 19, 20-year-old want to move down to the state of Florida and play college ball and get a great education?

I think that it says a lot about just our weather, our climate, but I think more importantly, it says a lot about really when you mention specifically those programs in UCF and Florida State and now Florida, and USF has spent plenty of postseason experience. I think it's the leadership and really what the coaches bring and how they take care of their athletes.

They're wanting to win ball games, but they're looking to also take care of their athletes and compete the right way. We've got a lot of good coaches, a lot of good high school systems, but I think it obviously says a lot about the population. It says a lot about the weather and what we have to offer obviously in the state of Florida. It's second to none.

**Q. This one is for Skylar. Just knowing how competitive you are, how difficult was it last year, and especially in an era when few people have to sit out when they transfer, just to have to sit back and kind of watch, especially what happened at the end of the season and all that?**

SKYLAR WALLACE: It definitely was not easy. Practicing and going through the hours that everyone else is going through, but not being able to compete was definitely a challenge.

But I talked a lot to my parents about it and had them on my side just to tell me to be the person that makes people better, find a way to accept your role and just get after it every day.

If it's taking an extra rep to push Hannah to do one more or if it's taking another rep and getting a bunt down to make someone else compete to get their job done, just find a way to accept that role and just do it.

Be the biggest supporter you can on the bench. Like you said, I am very competitive, so that was hard, but I found a way to accept that and just get after it. It's a different role, and it changed me in a way to make me lead better now in this season and just be there for my team.

**Q. Can you speak to what kind of a teammate she was during that time, please?**

TIM WALTON: I think it was hard. Obviously, when you look and go, gosh, it's one of our better players over there



sitting there in shorts and a T-shirt, but one of the things that most people don't understand is when an athlete is not eligible to compete, they're not eligible to take ground balls on game day or eligible to do all the other things the other team does.

What we did as a staff for Skylar and really at her direction and our direction, we ran a practice just for Skylar every game day on her own. So she came in. She got her swings. She got her ground balls, and she got her reps. She did all the things that the players were going to do, but we did it prior to anybody else going so she had an accountable athletic day of practice.

That was really something. To me if I'm Skylar, I'm sitting there going we're going to play a game, but yet our coaches are going to put X amount of time in to me to get better so I can continue to grow.

Then from there she did all the things that we needed her to do from a leadership standpoint and be able to not necessarily always say the right thing. She's learned how to really kind of say it in a way that people can take it because she is ultra competitive: Why the hell aren't you getting hits? Let's go. Swing the bat. Whoa, whoa, whoa, you don't get to play. You have to be able to say, why aren't we getting hits?

She learned a lot. It was really good. We got to spend a ton of one-on-one time with her and help her, mold her, grow her, and then she vice versa with us. Coach, I need more ground balls. I'm not good on that throw. How do we get one?

She's been as instrumental in my work ethic as I feel like my work ethic has been instrumental in hers. The impact of her as a leader as a competitor has really bled over now into this season when everybody gets a chance to see exactly what Skylar Wallace looks like when she's going well.

**Q. This will be for Tim and Skylar. I think that the last game in the Supers was such a good example of how starting strong can really snowball. How important is setting the tone early tomorrow?**

SKYLAR WALLACE: I think just going out there and getting after it on the first pitch is really important. It applies pressure. We have the speed. We can do multiple things. We have the power. We can slap. We can bunt. All of that stuff.

Just applying the pressure right off the bat is going to make Oregon State really do what they need to do: Field the ground balls, make the routine plays, make the hard plays,

make a good pitch. Be after it and ready to go. I think it's going to be really important just to jump off the bat right away.

TIM WALTON: I don't know what the statistics look like, but it feels like we're 10 of our last 12 when we score first, so I think it's really important.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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