

2022 Women's College World Series

Friday, June 3, 2022

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Northwestern Wildcats

Coach Kate Drohan

Rachel Lewis

Grace Neito

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA 6, Northwestern 1

THE MODERATOR: This is the Game 5 press conference featuring the Northwestern Wildcats.

If we could start out with questions for our student-athletes, please.

Q. Rachel, going back over your entire journey, 2018 in Athens, going all the way there, falling short against Georgia. Now you make it to this year and get the chance to get past that stage, get here. Even though it's bittersweet with what happened tonight, what does that journey and the people you've taken it with mean to you?

RACHEL LEWIS: It's meant everything. I think we've tried to get better and better every year. I think we've been pretty successful at that, and hopefully they come back next year even stronger.

It's been an honor to play for Kate and Caryl. It's meant everything to play with them (tearing up).

Q. Grace, it wasn't hard to see where your guys' fans were in the stadium in this World Series, as loud as can be. To have that support, how big was that for y'all?

GRACE NEITO: It was amazing having all the alumni here in the first five rows cheering us on every single inning, every single pitch. Really meant that the entire Northwestern family was backing us up every step we took. Made it a lot easier for us to step foot on the field.

Q. Grace, obviously as you move from a first year into a leader on this team, as Rachel has become next to

you, what are the lessons that you're going to take away from this weekend and tell future people who are currently in your position as a first year to prepare them for large situations going forward?

GRACE NEITO: I think a big lesson that I'll take from this week and the entirety of post-season, our entire season, is how much I can lean on my teammates and especially my upperclassmen, especially people like Rachel. Being able to lean on them, ask them for advice, what do I do, I'm nervous right now.

Just having them there every pitch, every step of the way, that I think is the biggest lesson I'll learn. I'll try to do that just as Rachel did for me when I am an upperclassman.

Q. Grace, first time in the post-season. You came up huge in the fifth and seventh inning with two outs. What was that feeling like in your first post-season, rising to the occasion?

GRACE NEITO: I just wanted to pass the bat and continue to fight for our team and get the bat into our top of the order so we could go from there.

Q. Rachel, not just one of the older players in this team, but one of the team's leaders, what do you hope you've left with players like Grace and the next generation of Northwestern softball?

RACHEL LEWIS: Just what she was saying. I hope they kind of -- I hope they learned how to lead from me and I hope I set a good example for them.

I hope that they bring confidence to the game in everything that they do. I think they're amazing and they have so much freaking potential, they're only going to get better from here.

Q. With everything you guys accomplished this year, you set out to get here, finally get to Oklahoma City, what do you think you guys are going to remember most when you look back on this season?

RACHEL LEWIS: The fun we had on and off the field. We



had a lot of fun with each other. We just loved each other and played the game and had fun playing the game.

We had some awesome moments this year that we'll always remember that will be some of the best moments of our lives. So we'll just always remember those.

GRACE NEITO: Yeah, I would honestly say, like, the bus rides and just eating with my friends, just like having this new family of these, like, amazing 20 girls that I get to, like, call friends for the rest of my life. I think that's, like, such an honor. I'm super grateful for all of them. I think that's what I'll enjoy most about this season.

Q. Can you talk about Danielle's effort this season, carrying you guys in the circle throughout the post-season as well?

GRACE NEITO: She is so composed and humble and she gives her all I think every single game no matter what. Even if she can -- she gives everything she can give every game. What that means to the rest of the team is incredible because we can give our all to her because she gives her all to us every game.

So it feels like we should do the same.

RACHEL LEWIS: Yeah, like Neito said, she's gritty, competitive, and she loves playing for us. We love playing for her. I think that was huge for us this year, just having someone like that on the mound that we could play behind.

She really was just a true competitor, left it all out there. I'm lucky to have played behind her.

Q. Rachel, obviously you came back for a fifth year. As you have a number of teammates in that locker room now that you're very tight with that face a similar decision, what will you tell them about the decision you made to come back? Do you think that should inform their decisions going forward?

RACHEL LEWIS: Yeah, Skyler asked me, like, yesterday I think in the hotel room, You glad you came back for your fifth year? I'm like, Hell, yeah. Who wouldn't be (smiling).

It was an awesome year. I'm so lucky to have been able to wear the uniform for five years. Of course, I mean, I wish everyone could get a fifth year because it was amazing. I'll remember this for the rest of my life, so...

Q. Rachel, even though you won't be there and that's going to be a little bit bittersweet, how excited are you to watch this group next year as they try to build off even this?

RACHEL LEWIS: I'm pumped. I'm excited to be a fan. I'm rooting for these guys. Like they have so much room to grow even from this, and we killed it this year. I think it's just going to be really, really fun to watch.

I'll always bleed purple, so...

THE MODERATOR: Rachel, Grace, thank you so much for your time.

Questions for coach, please.

Q. We just talked to UCLA's players. One of the things they mentioned was how much respect they have for Danielle inside the circle. Obvious question, but what has been her impact on this program over the years?

KATE DROHAN: She's been tremendous, right? She's very talented. Michele Gascoigne has done tremendous things mentoring her, right?

I think what you heard from them was her impact and what she's able to do on the field is so selfless, and that's I think really interesting for a pitcher who has literally carried us, to be so humble about it and never get frustrated about it if she doesn't have run support or an error behind her.

I've never seen it in four years. She's so steady with the game, and that's why we all love her so much. And she's really fun off the field.

Q. General big picture. What did this team and this season, what they were able to accomplish, mean to you?

KATE DROHAN: This team is one of a kind. I said this to them as often as I could. It was an honor to coach them, and I just loved seeing them every day (tearing up).

Q. Obviously you've been at this for quite some time at this program. You've been to the Women's College World Series before. After that 15-year gap, what does it mean to have some of those same players that brought you here in 2007 in the stands get to see the impact you made with a whole 'nother generation you made of Wildcats?

KATE DROHAN: It's overwhelming to see and to feel the support, not only the family, our families are amazing, then you have generations of women who stopped everything in their life to come support these 21 women in uniform, and also to see each other, to strengthen their bond they have between them.

I'm so proud of them. I'm so proud of the women they are. I'm so proud of what they've done with their lives after they've graduated. For them to come back, my goal is to feel like every single person who has worn the uniform is on this journey with us, and I think we felt that.

Q. Bit of a shift. I want to talk about the specific game for a second. A couple of the uncharacteristic mistakes, dropped pop-ups in particular, what do you attribute those two? A long season catching up? This game wasn't the best in some ways in those moments?

KATE DROHAN: Our team emptied the tank. I mean, they were gassed. And I think they were still ready to play tonight.

They gave every ounce of themselves to the game, to each other, and they gave it their all.

Q. What do you think you're going to remember most about what it was like to coach this group?

KATE DROHAN: It's a million little things. This team, they were so authentic and vulnerable to the process. I will remember really how grateful I have felt every single day that I've taken the field with them.

Q. 40 alumni outside just having the best time. We talked about a little bit in the beginning of the season about how special this team was. A lot of that '06 team was out there. How were these two teams similar? From my perspective they were very similar. Would you say that's pretty accurate?

KATE DROHAN: Absolutely. Absolutely. Both the '06 and the '22 teams were on a mission. Not for themselves, but for the program.

Everyone in our locker room has a very clear idea of what Northwestern softball is all about, and they wanted to live that every day.

If you look at us on the field, both teams were very physical, loved the weight room, loved playing hard, never felt like they were out of a game, and never ever backed down from a challenge. Those are the constants that I felt all year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Coach. We appreciate your time.

KATE DROHAN: Thanks. Thanks for being here. Go Cats.