

2022 Women's College World Series

Sunday, June 5, 2022

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

UCLA Bruins

Coach Kelly Inouye-Perez

Holly Azevedo

Maya Brady

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA 8, Florida 0

THE MODERATOR: This is the Game 9 press conference featuring the UCLA Bruins. We're joined by head Coach Kelly Inouye-Perez and student-athletes Holly Azevedo and Maya Brady. Questions for our student-athletes to start, please.

Q. Holly, can you talk about getting the start today. I believe you were the first start in the women's College World Series, and what that experience was like.

HOLLY AZEVEDO: It was really incredible, honestly. I couldn't do it without the people behind me. Our defense was really, really on point today, and obviously we had a really good outing with offense. So super blessed, and it was a really cool win.

Q. Maya, to have a pitcher like Holly but also to have a staff that also has Megan, what does that do for you as a teammate on this team?

MAYA BRADY: Yeah, I definitely feel for the hitters because we hit off them in practice and throughout the entire fall, so going into this season, I knew we were going to have a great staff. Obviously losing a pitcher like Rachel, I think everyone thought what is UCLA going to do? But little did they know we have Holly Azevedo and Lauren Shaw and Megan Faraimo. I'm just super proud to play with these pitchers because I know they're fighting.

It gives you confidence as a hitter because that's a great offensive team. And when you have a pitcher like Holly shut them down as hitters, that kind of pumps you up. It was a really cool game to see Holly do her thing and shine on the biggest stage.

Q. Holly, with this win today, being that you're a senior, this gives you one more chance to put on your jersey and play for UCLA. What does that mean to you?

HOLLY AZEVEDO: It means everything. I've spent the last five years with these girls, these coaches, with the university, and just to have an opportunity to go to a school like UCLA with academics and athletics, it's been truly an honor.

With girls next to me, both Coach I and Maya and everyone else, it's been really cool to experience the different diversity and just have these really cool friendships and relationships with everyone.

Q. For both student-athletes, you now get your chance, tomorrow you're going to play OU, the team that knocked you out last year. I think, Holly, you closed that game out last year if I remember correctly. You guys get that chance. With a win like today, how do you carry that confidence over?

MAYA BRADY: Obviously they're an incredible team all around, but I think for us something that I think that this team has really gone through this year would be adversity, and I think that it's only made us stronger, and it's really made us look within.

So our coach talks about it a lot. Don't even worry about the opponent. You want to make the opponent study you, and I think that's something that this team is really good at is focusing on each other. We've had to look to each other all year, so obviously we know it's going to be a tough game, but we're going to take it one pitch at a time.

And I know that I have 23 sisters that are going to have my back throughout the whole game and I'm not doing it alone. I think that it's just a really amazing opportunity on the biggest stage to be with this team, so I'm really excited.

HOLLY AZEVEDO: She said it all. I'm not going to lie (laughter). She said it all. I can't even comment. That's exactly how I feel. No, seriously, that was really good.

Q. Maya, can you just talk about that fourth inning you guys put on that early run, and in that fourth inning, I believe you scored four runs to extend the lead. What went into that? What adjustments did you make?

MAYA BRADY: I think that we just decided that we weren't going to let the change-up be a factor anymore. I think our team does a really good job of getting stronger throughout the game, so that first run by Kelli was huge for us. But we were fighting the whole game. It was just a matter of time.

Our team definitely gets stronger throughout every single at-bat, and we kind of all take things from each other. So just watching the other at-bats of my teammates because I think everyone had great at-bats throughout the whole game, we were kind of able to jump on it. Things in softball, you've got to have a little bit of luck, and things started to fall. So it was a really huge inning for us.

Q. Holly, what were your just emotions at the end of the game? I think your teammates dumped a little water on you, so just share that moment with them.

HOLLY AZEVEDO: It was pretty cold (laughter). No, the emotions that ended the game were crazy. I mean, when Savi got that double, I believe, I was going crazy alongside all the girls in the dugout. Then just having that moment with everyone just dumping water on me. I mean, yeah, it was crazy. Yeah, it was definitely a cool moment.

THE MODERATOR: Literally a cool moment.

HOLLY AZEVEDO: Iced moment.

THE MODERATOR: Holly, Maya, thank you very much for your time. Congratulations. Questions for Coach, please.

Q. When Holly was talking there, I could see you were lighting up and just smiling seeing your fifth-year senior getting this opportunity. What does it mean to you to have her have a game like that?

KELLY INOUEY-PEREZ: I've said this from the start. She's so selfless. To be able to be behind Megan and Rachel for her entire career and to come back, to choose to come back into the master's program to be able to get back, I'm so proud.

She's a hard worker. She is very talented, but she's selfless. To come back and do this for her team says a lot. COVID was a negative for a lot of people, but it allowed for the opportunity for players that missed that season to be able to come back, and I'm grateful. Literally Kinsey Washington and Bri Perez and Holly are back to be able to give back to the program.

Moments like this, we have been waiting for this, and she hasn't had that opportunity on this stage. So I couldn't be more proud and happy for her and for us that she pitched her game today.

Q. Coach, something you've said all season is that defense wins games, and I feel like that was on full display today with the defense earning 16 of the 18 outs. How do you feel like your team stood behind Holly?

KELLY INOUEY-PEREZ: Literally. And I think we know Megan is a different type of pitcher. She throws hard and high and throws down as well. With Holly, we said before the game, it was about defense. We talked about moving your feet and being able to -- that was the name of the game, was defense today.

So super proud. And I said from last year, we did not execute well on the stage last year defensively, and that was a focus from fall of '21; that at this point in the game it really comes down to defense. The timely hits will come. Today was an amazing offensive display, but it's really about defense is what won us the ball game today.

Q. Holly's been solid throughout her career, but this year it seems like she's really taken her game to another level. What would you attribute that to?

KELLY INOUEY-PEREZ: I give Lisa Fernandez a ton of credit. She really prepares these pitchers mentally, physically. They have this thing called champ camp, where they actually go through a full workout, and it's a grinding, challenging, physical workout before they pitch. And the whole talk is, when we get to Oklahoma, it's going to be hot. You've got to be able to compete under those circumstances, or we may be in a position where you have to play extra games. So there was that, the mental side.

Then the physical part of it, if you could come to our practice and see the energy in the bullpen and the work ethic, and it's not just the pitchers and the starting catchers, but we have bullpen catchers that also are fully vested, and there's a whole process that goes into play.

So they prepare for this moment. This language of being your best when your best is needed at the World Series started in fall. I'm so proud because they're very close, they work very hard, they're physically, mentally prepared to be able to execute their game. And I think the rest is just an athlete experience. I'm so proud for Holly to be able to do what Holly does.

Q. Obviously UCLA has done so many firsts. Today is

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another first. You were on ABC for the first time. What does that mean for you, the program, and the sport?

KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ: Huge. Like I said, being able to have the coverage of softball at this level, it just speaks volumes to where the sport is going. We get to get in the living rooms, what we have in our own conferences, we have televised games, but what ESPN does, has done to be able to literally allow everyone to see the whole road.

But today is a big day, right? To be able to have more than just those ESPN followers be able to see our sport, and my hope is they can fall in love with it and continue to follow it.

I want it to be an Olympic sport, so this is a great opportunity to showcase how exciting the game can be -- offense, defense, pitching, just some big moments. But big for the sport, great for the growth, more young little athletes that have role models that might fall in love with the sport and hope they can play it and have a dream one day to be on this stage and play just like these girls did today.

Q. Obviously your pitching is the strength of your team, and now you'll be going up against an Oklahoma team known for their offense. What do you think the keys will be for your staff?

KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ: The whole message here at the World Series is it's really about us. Like Maya was saying, the biggest opponent we have is ourselves. In day one to be in the situation that we're in is we beat ourselves. We did not play great ball. We weren't out here.

But I told them we also get the opportunity to play more games, and we're going to turn it into a positive because, if we can put ourselves in a position to play our game, the opponent, that is definitely respect. We respect everyone, we fear no one.

So we've got to be able to come out and play our game at the end of the day, and if we do that, then it will be a great day of softball. That's all that we're focusing on right now.

Q. For your team offensively, it seemed like everyone was just grinding out at-bats. What did you like about that?

KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ: I think literally there were moments -- one of the hardest things to do, and it's so easy to say, to be able to watch, to be able to be patient and sit back on change. Everyone is watching saying, oh, my God, they're swinging at balls. They're so aggressive.

To be on the stage with a sense of urgency and to be able to slow the game down, it takes a lot of experience. It

takes a lot of trust. It takes a lot of practicing that process of being able to let balls get deeper and swing at strikes. That's the name of the game.

So we were a little aggressive at one point, and kind of came together and took some deep breaths to be able to say, you know what -- and I told the girls straight up: You want to win this game, we've got to be able to dial in and be better at swinging at strikes and letting the ball travel.

So they did a great job of making an adjustment, but it is a credit to them and their commitment and will to win because those Florida pitchers were throwing some nasty stuff, and the strike zone started to be a little different. You know, it was just a little different, so we had to make an adjustment. Super proud.

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