

2023 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide
Coach Patrick Murphy
Montana Fouts
Ally Shipman
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Alabama.

Patrick, if you want to start with an opening statement.

PATRICK MURPHY: Welcome, everyone. I really appreciate everybody being here. We had great media at our regional and super regional. A packed house every single time. It means so much to the girls and myself that you guys cover the sport of softball.

I was listening to ESPN radio on the way in to work one morning. The gentleman is a huge softball fan, let's just say that. His remarks were incredible. He was just so high on the sport. He said, I cannot wait to see what this sport is like in 10 years. I really believe that it's just going to get bigger and bigger and bigger and better and better and better.

The first time I was here I think was 1993 with Southwestern Louisiana. My associate head coach, Aly, was on the team. I cannot tell you the differences of the facility, this. It is just remarkable.

If I had a son, and he played in Omaha, I want him to have the best experience of his life playing college baseball at the highest level. If I had a daughter, I would want her to have the exact same experience playing at the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City.

It's getting closer. I applaud the NCAA, the committee, for doing that. And I can't wait to get going.

THE MODERATOR: I guess we'll open it up to questions.

Q. Starting with Montana, the Tennessee series this year was not your best outing. From that point on the flip kind of switched and you had all the scoreless

streaks against Missouri. After that, what changed for you?

MONTANA FOUTS: I would say mentally trying to be a little bit sharper, physically a little bit sharper, bring more to the table. I felt there were a couple things I could work on. I think I just took the series and learned from it. I feel like that's what we all did as a team.

ALLY SHIPMAN: Yeah, I could just by her commitment and focus after that series. There was a look in her eye that said I'm going to compete and I'm going to get better for the team, and she did that, and she did it really well.

Q. Coach, in terms of Montana's knee, how would you describe her treatment and rehab? Is it ramping down, finished? How would you characterize that?

PATRICK MURPHY: I think it's a daily process. I think she probably could answer it better. Our training staff, the doctors, anybody that's laid a hand on her has been incredible, I think she'd echo that.

Q. Montana and Ally, I think the video we have of you guys after that last strike in the supers is the most emotional and hyped I've seen you guys all season. Montana, can you take me through the moment before you threw that pitch, in that moment having your team gather around you?

MONTANA FOUTS: I think for me personally, that moment was this year in general. I feel like as soon as I stepped on campus with Team 27, I knew I wanted to be a part of bringing this team to the World Series. I wanted that for our freshmen, I wanted it for sophomores, juniors, they had never been, the rest of the seniors. That was my focus all year long.

Coming into the elimination game, especially at supers, we have the best fans in the country, that atmosphere, I knew I wanted to leave it all on the line, and that included my heart, too.

Q. Patrick, in your opening statement you said Women's College World Series is getting closer to the



men's. How has it gotten closer? What in your mind still remains to get it on that same level?

PATRICK MURPHY: I think, number one, this facility. We would come here and there wasn't a warning track or a permanent fence. We complained for years and years and years. Caitlin Lowe, I remember, hit her chin on the fence, half of it fell off. It was on national television. It did not look good.

Now it's a permanent fence, padded by a professional company all the way around. The dugouts, bathrooms in the dugout, huge. There used to be a port-a-potty in the dugout or you'd have to run to the bullpen.

This room is spectacular. There's enough room for everybody. The whole atmosphere is just so much better. I just applaud everybody that's working towards equity. You put me on the spot, darn it. I should have had a list. I'd probably have a list after.

Q. Montana, as someone that's never hyperextended my knee, what pain are you going through? How, if any, has that changed your approach in the circle?

MONTANA FOUTS: Honestly, God has blessed me with a lot less pain than you probably would think. Pain is temporary. I'll feel that some other day.

Q. Patrick, pace of play, it's been a topic of conversation. Do you see that as an issue at all? If so, what are some changes you would like to see?

PATRICK MURPHY: I think the biggest thing I would like, I've tried in the past, is I like the one foot in the box rule. It goes on in international softball. I think it's in college baseball. I remember Haylie McCleney telling me a story, who played for us and then was with the Olympic team and USA, the first time she played it was full count, and as she had done in the past, she stepped way out of the box, did her thing with her bat. The umpire looked at her and went, Strike 3. She forgot. She just like, Oh, my God, I got out of the box. She never did it again.

You guys all have seen the Major League Baseball, all the rules that are going on, how quick their game is going now. I think you'll see that in college baseball without a doubt. They're all looking at pro baseball like, Oh, my God, it's going faster.

Our game right now is still faster, better watched on TV than a lot of other sports. I think the pace of play is key. I would definitely go without a foul ball, you know, if there's no foul ball, you stay one foot in the box, you don't walk around, and I think that would help out a lot.

Q. Both Karen Weekly and Lonni Alameda said they'd like to see a pitch clock as well, 20-second clock. Is that something you'd be in favor of?

PATRICK MURPHY: Absolutely.

Q. Montana, not to put you on the spot, but you've watched this game change since you've been in school. What does college soft need to continue to grow?

MONTANA FOUTS: Honestly I would just say push the views and things like that. Like Murph said, it's well watched on TV. A lot of people are loving it and keeping up with it. Getting a lot of teams, not just in the SEC, across the country, just more visual TV, people can turn on and watch anybody that they want to, I think that's really key in growing it.

Q. Murph, having played this team four times this year already, in your mindset, how much does that play into preparation for a fifth and most important meeting? And Ally, what is your relationship like with some of these players on Tennessee? What is this opportunity like for you?

PATRICK MURPHY: I think, number one, it's the scouting. We know each other, we played each other in Fayetteville at the SEC. We played early SEC, like March 17th, I think it was St. Patrick's Day. They're way different from what they were then, as are we, but the players are similar.

Our lineup is different, their lineup is a little bit different. Honestly, their pitching staff is very strong. They double dipped in the SEC, they won the regular season and the tournament, so they're the favorite. They're the favorite in this game. We're the underdogs big-time. I feel like we're like the little engine that could.

But either way, I think it will be a really entertaining game. We always have good games between Tennessee and Alabama. It could go either way.

ALLY SHIPMAN: That's a really, really great program. There's only a handful of girls that are there that I played with. I'm really close with Ashley Rogers still. She will always be a great friend of mine. I love her to death.

Great group of girls, great program. We've played them enough to know it's going to be a great game, it's going to be a lot of fun. We're just excited to get going.

Q. Montana, Alabama has certainly had their share of celebrity athletes in other sports. Could you talk about

what it means, Coach is calling you a rockstar, icon. Could you talk about what that means for you and for possibly promoting the sport or anything like that? Also, who is the most unusual person or persons to reach out to you during this kind of run of celebrity status?

MONTANA FOUTS: Okay, so to answer the first question, I don't know if I consider myself those things, but I'm very honored he does. I remember before I committed here, I was on the phone with Murph. I was pacing in my bedroom, like a 12-year-old does whenever they're talking to Patrick Murphy. He was talking to me and said, If you come here, you're going to be a rockstar. I was like, Wait, I want to be a rockstar (smiling).

The rest is history.

Yeah, I mean, this is the best opportunity I've ever had. I'm honored to be in the list of those categories, like you said. We're just focused on winning softball games.

I would say the person that's probably reached out to me that's kind of I'm honored to say Hardy, a country music singer, that was a couple years ago. I feel like lot of people have.

PATRICK MURPHY: Saban has Nick at Noon on Friday before home football games. 600 people come into this hotel ballroom to eat lunch. Then they have a warmup speaker. He comes in after his media obligations. He sits at the stage and they ask questions of him. The microphone goes to the crowd and they can ask questions of Coach Saban. That's when the real fun starts because somebody is going to ask a really dumb question and he's going to rip them. That's why everybody goes to this.

This year I was the warmup guy before Texas A&M, which was a huge game. There were 750 people in this ballroom, I don't think you could stick another chair in there. I brought Miss Fouts with me. When we walked in, everybody was in line to eat. We walked all the way up to the front of the room, right next to the stage, and I don't think anybody saw her.

The warmup guy is me, they introduce me. I do my thing. The weird part of it is you never know when Coach Saban is going to come in. One year I'm telling this great story, I think it's the best story in the world, and I see this. He's coming in. I was like, Oh, man. Roll Tide, everybody. I get off the stage.

Two years later I am done, I'm done, and I look at the guy in the front. He's doing this because the media is talking longer. I didn't know what to do that time.

I did my little thing, and I showed Montana's tweet after last year, when she announced she was coming back for our fifth-year. I said, Loyalty is very, very, very difficult to get nowadays, but one kid had it. They put her tweet on the screen, and the place went wild.

I said, You know what, I got a surprise for you guys. I got a friend that came that wants to say hi. Of course, Miss Montana stands up, she's 6'2", now everybody sees her. There were 12 guys from the national championship team in 2012 there as well. Afterwards, one of the gentlemen from Alabama came up to me, he ran us down, Murph, did you hear Montana's ovation was twice as loud as the national championship? We were laughing.

Montana gets up, she gives her speech, which was terrific. She gets another standing ovation. We go to practice, so we're talking out of this ballroom, and all of a sudden I hear, Hey, Montana. We stop in our tracks. We turn around. Coach Saban. I love to watch you pitch. Nothing to me (smiling), Montana got the kudos from Coach Saban.

It was really a cool moment for me 'cause I think he does watch us all the time, especially from his living room. She is a rockstar. Wherever we go, it is wild. It's the Beatles coming to town. It's Michael Jordan getting off the bus. That's the best way to describe it.

Q. Patrick, we're getting closer and closer to the Sooners getting to the SEC. What are they in for? What are you guys in for when they get there?

PATRICK MURPHY: I think we have 3200 season ticketholders, we average almost 3800 a game. When they play them at home, I think it's in 2025, already decided, those three games will be sold out in February. There will not be a ticket. There will be scalpers. Online it will be \$220 per ticket for sure.

I think it's the grind of the SEC, these ladies can say every weekend is like a World Series matchup. You play three games. It is tiring. It is mentally exhausting. It's like, Oh, my God, I got to play Florida, Georgia, I got LSU and Auburn. Everybody is good. Everybody is good. We lost to the last-place team in the league. Anybody can beat you at any time. If you don't bring it, you're going to get your butt beat. I think that's what they're going to face.

On top of that, with their tradition, what they've been doing, it's going to be double in terms of the fans, the opposing teams, the willingness to compete, it will go through the roof for both schools.

Also for the SEC, when we had Texas A&M and Missouri

come in, you guys know this, the two biggest sports at those two schools was softball. The two best sports for Oklahoma and Texas to me are softball. Who gets the raw end of the deal? It's softball, me (laughter).

Our league is strong right now. We got 12 out of 13. Shoot, I wouldn't doubt if we get 15 out of 15 because it's going to be that strong.

It's just going to be a lot. The gentlemen in the back row for ESPN and SEC Network, they're going to have a heyday with it, as are all of you.

Q. Patrick, you mentioned in regionals that Jaala overcame a lot in this season. Can you characterize the adversity that she's overcome? Then unrelated to that, how would you describe the inspiration that Madelyn Daigle's cancer fight has brought to the team?

PATRICK MURPHY: One of you guys tweeted, one our local media tweeted, Jaala Torrence starts for the first time since March 16th I think. I was like, That can't be true. I literally got on my phone, looked at our schedule, looked at every start, and I was like, Holy buckets, it's true.

It was a midweek game at UNA, and it was spring break. Every game after that she came in relief. Here she is starting against LIU for the first time in regionals, and it was the first time since March. I don't know if you realize that.

She never wants to be Debbie the Downer, never Pouty Polly. She kept working with Lance. It was just this gradual build, and she got better and better and better. I would look in the pen, they were doing drills they would do in the fall just for correct spin. All of that went into her play of that weekend.

The final two weeks she was spectacular. I think we all thought she had it in her. She needed to know it. I don't know if it was that first game that gave her the confidence, but she got better and better and better, and was spectacular for us. There's no way we'd be here without her.

You guys want to speak about Madelyn.

MONTANA FOUTS: For just a perspective --

PATRICK MURPHY: Maybe explain.

MONTANA FOUTS: Madelyn, she is a little girl, she is six years old, fighting cancer right now. We love her dearly. She draws on cleats, she sends them to us. She's an artist. She's very beautiful inside and out. She's really

given us the motivation and I feel like perspective to know that softball is just for fun. She loves softball, loves to watch. We always know we have our biggest cheerleader watching us.

It's just perspective that softball is just a game and we are inspirational to other people, as well as she is to us.

ALLY SHIPMAN: Ashley Prange and me actually went and visited her in the hospital, which is cool. She's decorated cleats. We get pictures of her praying for Alabama softball, which is the cutest thing ever. She's six years old, and she's out there praying for Alabama softball.

She's been an inspiration for the team. When you think about it, we could lose all the games in the world, but the perspective of her and her fight and her faith is really what has motivated us to get this far.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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