

2023 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

Patty Gasso

Alex Storako

Haley Lee

Grace Lyons

Press Conference



ALEX STORAKO: Coach Rocha has been great at just being that mother in the bullpen. She's been great leading us not as pitchers but as people too. I think that's a big aspect in our bullpen, how we communicate with each other, how we work together on and off the field.

The way she's able to work with us is a huge part of our success.

PATTY GASSO: I recruited Jen Rocha out of high school when I was coaching at Long Beach City College. Then I got the job at OU. She stayed at Long Beach City, then I recruited her to come to OU. So I've been with her since my beginnings.

When she left, went on to Wichita State and then with Coach Walton off to Florida. When Coach Lombardi left for Oregon, I thought, okay, this is a long shot, I'm going for it. I went for it and got her back again.

The connection has been fantastic. I think she is a perfect blend because J.T. and I have this head coach/hitting coach, mother/son thing going on. So I need that neutral balance, calm, cool, sensible to put all of this in order.

Besides that, she is just an outstanding communicator with pitchers. Her style is exceptional, and they gravitate to it.

Q. Patty, you guys played Stanford so early in the season. What, if anything, can you kind of take from that game seeing the paths the teams have taken since then?

PATTY GASSO: Not a lot at all because we're two completely different teams. I know that they're so much better. NiJaree is now in their rotation. Every team starts, you have no idea -- if we could remember back to our first weekend, we were looking around like what's going on? We weren't quite ready to play, and I think a lot of teams feel that way.

Whether we won or lost, I don't take much from it because we're all so, so different, and they look different on video and the games we've seen lately.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get ready with Oklahoma. We have Coach Patty Gasso with athletes Grace Lyons, Haley Lee, and Alex Storako.

Patty, do you maybe have an opening statement?

PATTY GASSO: Just blessed to be here again. Never gets old. So excited to get started.

Q. Patty, you just mentioned you've had several teams here. You've had teams that win. Maybe what has stood out about this year's team and the way they've gotten here?

PATTY GASSO: I think just it started as a very diverse group, a lot of different backgrounds, different cultures. Almost unsure what it was going to blend like. They did such a significant effort into creating this culture that they really gravitated to, where I don't know, if they found each other on the street, that they would all be best friends, but when you put them in a room and put softball in front of them, they've created this connection like nothing I've seen.

It's still kind of amazing because they're so different. Each one up here is so completely different than the other. Yet they found a way to blend this entire team in, and it's been really amazing to watch.

Q. Alex and Coach, I want to ask you about Jen Rocha, the pitching coach. What's your relationship like with her? For Alex, how has she helped you along in your career? Patty, how have you been able to keep her here so long?



Q. Patty, you obviously live in this softball-mad state all the time, but this week, I'm wondering what it's like to sort of see, with the series coming here and the attention, is it any different? Does it feel any different this week, just the ramp-up of the way softball is right now in the state?

PATTY GASSO: Not really. I feel any time both teams are in, there's more excitement, I would guess. To be quite honest, I don't pay that much attention. I know that everybody's excited about it in state.

But they've been in it for the last so many years and we have as well, so I don't know that it feels extra different this time.

Q. Haley, there's all you're here to play for this week, and I know how you feel, there's one goal. But for yourself, what memories do you have watching this from afar, the World Series, and then getting to be here for yourself for the first time? What is that like this week?

HALEY LEE: Watching it from afar growing up, it's like a dream come true. You take away the 8-year-old's dream and make it a reality. Just getting to take this path and getting to experience it with such great players and great teammates, they've really made the journey like the funnest it could have been.

I'm very excited to be here. I was watching just the media videos that everybody was getting to do earlier and just kind of taking it in. It's really been a blessing to be here today and to be here with these girls. So I'm excited, and I'm very excited to be here.

Q. Patty, mentioning the ramp-up and how big it's gotten, and I asked Lonni Alameda this, but last night at the social you were still talking about how to improve, how to grow the game. You probably have a long list, but at the top of it, where does the game need to grow the next five years to be better than it is now?

PATTY GASSO: One thing I'd like to see happen is in the regional championship there's no double headers. I think we need to get rid of double headers completely in postseason. The only time we play double headers is early, like in February and early March, and then they're gone. Then we bring them back. It's laborious, especially at the end of the season, to be on a field for that long. So that's something I would talk about.

I haven't really put a lot of thought into it, but there's lots of things I put my head to. It's nice to talk to other coaches and kind of hear their narratives as well.

Q. I have a question for Alex and a question for Patty: Alex, from day one when you stepped on campus with this program, can you talk us through seeing the fan support, seeing the kids wanting autographs, and now it will probably be at another level these next couple days? What's this journey been like for you? And for Patty, can you talk a little bit about the role models these kids are. We talk about it all the time, but now it seems like it's even more now because you guys are under the spotlight even more.

ALEX STORAKO: Oklahoma, as I was getting recruited here even, just seeing that almost different world we kind of have with how our fans follow us and the details that are known and just the excitement that's around us kind of 365. It's really fun to kind of be able to outwardly express that kind of passion and excitement and emotion because you see that within us and in our team and how we play.

It's cool to see it kind of reciprocated. Playing last weekend at Marita Hynes and hearing how loud and passionate our fans were, it was kind of a mirror of how we were in the dugout and on the field in every play.

I think that's another big thing that's going to grow the game is when you have fans that can buy into your program and buy into the players that are representing that kind of school. When you have that and you have softball on the TV all day, that's so exciting for me because I feel like even in my college career in the past five years the difference from my freshman year till now is 0 to 100. So it's been really cool to be a big part of the growth and growing step in the game, which is really, really fun.

PATTY GASSO: I think I got it. Grace is grace, the word "grace," cool, calm, thought provoked. She's a settler. She is like "hear me, listen to me." She's one of the longest standing in our program, her and Grace Green. So her experience shows, and when she speaks, everything gets quiet and everybody listens. So it's like having easily another coach on the field.

Alex, fun personality, big smile, joyful style. Focused but really passionate when she gets what she wants. Fun to watch.

This one right here (indicating Haley) is a treasure, a treasure. In a weird way, I'm proud of myself because, when we faced her, when we faced Haley at Texas A&M, it was a nightmare. There's certain hitters that when they come up, and I'm like, oh, no, no way. And I know Rocha was feeling the same way. That was Haley.

When I saw she was in the portal, I didn't know her, but I

was trying to kind of judge her. I hadn't seen a lot of girls with a lot of tattoos and so forth, right? I heard that she drives a motorcycle. I'm like, okay, this could be a major problem. I don't know if this is going to fit. It was actually Grace Lyons and I, I'm like I'm going to call her. I'm not going to do this. I've got to call her.

When I got on the phone, it was just a sweet voice and a wonderful conversation. She came in on a visit. It was Grace and I. We were like the only ones in town. And she came on campus with her mother and her grandmother, and sitting with her, I just -- this is going to be weird, but kind of fell in love with her personality.

Just so happy that I wasn't so lame to say, oh, no, I don't want to do that. But she -- I'm going to say this to you because you have a career in like cartoon voices.

(Laughter).

She is in the dugout. She's not on the field all the time, and she's near me enough that there are so many different voices coming out of her from -- I'm not going to make you imitate any, but it is a trip. Again, I can't even -- I keep looking down like, who is making that sound? It's this one right here.

So all of them bring some unique, genuine wonderfulness to this team.

Q. Patty, you stole my question because I was going to ask Grace, since she's been here the longest, to talk about the different cultures. Did the softball cut through all of that? You've seen a lot. You had a lot of different teammates. How did you guys kind of blend and make it work on the field?

GRACE LYONS: What's so special about college softball is you do get a new class each year. Growing up in travel ball, you kind of play with the same group all the way through.

College is awesome because you're there for a mission of four, and we got five years. So a little extra year. But you always get a new group. Every single year the team is different, and you kind of have to figure out how you guys want to rally each year.

Coming up with maybe just like a team dynamic that will change slowly. We still stick to that championship mindset. That's just how the Sooner program is and the legacy has left it, but each year is so unique.

I think it goes to, one, the type of players that Coach recruits, just so open and kind and welcoming to everyone.

We're all competitors, but I think the human side is something that's special that we don't really give much credit to of how everyone is so unique, but we really rally around the fact that we are -- we're people too. And we have hobbies and passions, and a lot of us have a strong faith in the Lord, and I think that's something that's important to a lot of us, knowing that it's so much bigger than what happens on the field.

That's something that brings it into perspective for all of us.

Yes, these four or five years are awesome, but what are we going to do after? How are we going to be after? Coach prepares us to turn into women after, to become wives and moms and things like that, that goes way beyond this sport. So that perspective allows us to be welcoming to everyone, invite all different personalities, and everyone can be themselves in the locker room and on the field.

Q. Patty, you mentioned Canady from Stanford. I was wondering if you ran across her in the recruiting trail. If so, what do you remember about her then, how that went? Then what particularly stands out to you about her as a pitcher this year?

PATTY GASSO: Yes, I did, and I will just stop right there. She's not here. She's a great, great athlete, great hitter, really good pitcher. She has really grown maybe more from a thrower to a pitcher, probably around her junior year and going into her senior year, she started to really dominate some teams. Stanford's done a great job with her.

I have seen her -- I've known her for a long time. She used to come to camps a lot, wonderful family, wonderful girl. I'm happy for her, and their coaching staff has done a really good job with her and developing her into a really outstanding pitcher.

Q. Haley and Grace, I was going to ask you about her but had to pivot a little bit with something Patty said. First of all, what do you remember about that first meeting between the two of you? Haley, tell us about the motorcycles.

HALEY LEE: Well, for starters, you ride a motorcycle. You don't really drive it. I'm not going to go too deep into that.

(Laughter).

Long story short, my grandma used to ride motorcycles in the day, and she had one in her garage, and she was offering up to my guy cousins, and I'm like, well, grandma, why can't I have it? Like I'll take it from you. My parents were like no, but I'm kind of hardheaded. So I went and

scheduled me a class anyways, paid for it and everything. I'm like it's nonrefundable, so I'm going to go.

Then got my license, took the bike to get fixed, and then I just started riding. It's really fun. It's really freeing. The weather in Norman isn't always the best, but when it is, I'm out there. So it's fun.

Q. And then that first meeting between you and Grace. Interested in both of y'all's perspectives on that.

HALEY LEE: Well, I was a little nervous. I don't know if the knew or not. I was a little more not reserved, but kind of quieter than normal. But as we went on and I got to learn more about each of them, I really started to get comfortable and just started to kind of express and really just show off my personality.

It was really fun. I got to see the family side of everyone, and I really drew and connected with that. So I was really excited. Family's really big to me, so just getting to be with that and getting to really grasp that was very important for me as well.

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have for Oklahoma. Thank you to Patty, Grace, Haley, and Alex.

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