

2023 Women's College World Series

Sunday, June 4, 2023

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Karen Weekly

Zaida Puni

Ashley Rogers

Postgame Press Conference



Tennessee - 3, Oklahoma State - 1

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started. We'll start with a statement from Tennessee head coach Karen Weekly. Then go to questions to Zaida Puni and Ashley Rogers.

KAREN WEEKLY: I just told our team, times I think I couldn't be more proud of them, and then they make me more proud. Tonight was one of those times.

To bounce back like we did from yesterday, just realizing we just had to flush it and not spend any time thinking about it and to come out and play just a really, really tough game against a very good Oklahoma State team. That was kind of like a classic fast pitch battle. Ashley Rogers just willed herself to just throw some really, really good pitches and just got better as we went.

Q. Ashley, you threw 136 pitches tonight. I assume that eventually starts wearing on you a little bit toward the end. How did you gut that out?

ASHLEY ROGERS: I feel like I'm pretty conditioned to throw that. I've probably thrown over 100 pitches most of my game. Trusting my preparation, trusting the defense, continue to fight and fight every single pitch.

Q. Just for both players, what was kind of the vibe like headed into today, and what was kind of the energy and how did you guys pick yourselves up?

ASHLEY ROGERS: I think just putting it behind us. We don't think that was us on the field yesterday. Just knowing who we are as a team and just playing Tennessee softball and just flushing it, turning the page. It's a new day, it's a new game. When we step on the field, we focus on

Oklahoma State and focus on our opponent.

Just learning from our mistakes every day and continuing to trust each other and trust our game.

ZAIDA PUNI: She pretty much touched on all of it, but just going out there, playing for each other.

Q. It seems like you've had a lot of games like this where you've been able to bounce back after a pretty tough loss and really get a really solid win. What allows this team to bounce back that way consistently throughout the season?

ASHLEY ROGERS: Kind of what we just said, just learning from it, learning from our mistakes or what we didn't like about the game before and just putting it behind us, not dwelling on it, but using it as an opportunity to learn instead of leaving it as a failure, disappointment, whatever.

Just continuing to learn from our mistakes and growing in that aspect. Turning the page, it's a new day, it's a new game, and focusing on that game.

ZAIDA PUNI: I was actually about to say that. We do really well at not dwelling on the past.

Q. Ashley, I'm not even sure which defensive play would be the defensive highlight of the game. What can you say about that defense behind you this evening?

ASHLEY ROGERS: They're incredible. I just have every bit of confidence in them, and I know they're going to go out and give me everything they have every single time on every single play. They just go all out. They're absolutely incredible.

I'm so spoiled in the aspect I feel like they're going to get to every single ball. I just love playing with them on that field.

Q. For both players, starting with you, Ashley, what's it like playing in this atmosphere, in this setting with the great Vols fans, including Monica Abbott in attendance watching you play?

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ASHLEY ROGERS: It's so cool. I feel like that's what every little girl, every little softball player dreams about is coming out on this stage and playing. Just loving the opportunity. Just having this awesome opportunity to play with the amazing teammates that I have, it's just so cool.

I just want to cherish and savor every single moment, not take any moment for granted. Just be so thankful for the work that we've done and that God's plan was for us to be here.

ZAIDA PUNI: It's a different atmosphere obviously, but just being here, and our families in the stand, my family's here, just seeing them when I walk out on the field is just cool. I'm just so happy to be here, especially with this team.

It was a long journey, but I wouldn't want it to be with anybody else.

Q. Zaida, when Kiki Milloy got that steal off second and you hit the double, it seemed to jump start the energy and get the bats flowing. How critical was that inning to just sort of loosen up the offense?

ZAIDA PUNI: It was huge. My plan was just to see the ball and hit it. Like every time I go up to bat, I'm trying to score Kiki or at least move her. So attacking the pitches that are good.

Q. In that third when you guys scored the runs, they had a couple walks. Did you sense any talk, or was there talk amongst your team about opportunities, them giving you base runners and a chance to really jump on them there?

KAREN WEEKLY: It was more about making sure that we were swinging at pitches that were in the zone. I thought early on we were chasing a little bit, and so we really kind of hammered on that. Just, hey, we've got to get laser focused on having some better at-bats. That allowed us to get the walks but then it also allowed us to square up balls that were in the zone.

Q. Same thing I asked the players. What has allowed this team throughout the season to bounce back after tough losses and come back and get wins like this?

KAREN WEEKLY: It's a player-led team. That's been the key. Ever since about just past the midpoint of the season, I can give them a message, but if you don't have strong leaders on the team that are filtering that same message and dripping it constantly on their teammates, it's going to be empty words.

The two that were just here, Zaida, Ashley, Kiki, Boo, Rylie, Shak, Shakara, Nic, they just do a really good job of filtering that message down and continuing to spread it. That was my message last night, and this morning we said, are we good? They said, yeah, we're good.

Q. Knowing you have to play again tomorrow, how important was it for Ashley to go as long as she did and get a complete game?

KAREN WEEKLY: Once Ashley goes out there, it's really not going to do us a lot of good to pull her early and try to save anything. Plus she's so darn good.

But I just felt like she got stronger and stronger. She threw a lot of pitches, like she said, she typically does. To get that kind of outing out of her today was fantastic. Really I'm happy that we didn't have to throw Payton today. We'll have a very fresh Payton for tomorrow.

Q. Coach, you guys had some pretty important defensive plays in there. Can you kind of talk about the importance of those and specifically the play at the plate in the fourth inning?

KAREN WEEKLY: That relay play, it's an everyday thing at practice. Every single day, we work that play. They ran it as pretty close to perfection as you could. G, that's one of the reasons G's behind the plate. She's just a phenomenal defensive player.

The way she picked the ball. The way she made sure she's never in the way of the base runner, obstructing or anything, and puts a tag on. That was cool.

A lot of great plays today. Kiki makes a diving catch. Lou makes a diving catch in left field. I thought Lou made some really, really key plays for us. When they started off the sixth inning with that spinner that took one bounce up the middle and she came and got that like she did, that could have started a rally for them.

Defense is something we spend a lot of time on. I'm happy for them. They work that play to perfection in practice all the time. So it's kind of fun for them to have a chance to do it out here.

Q. What did it take to get Ashley Rogers in the circle today? You said on TV she just had a warrior mindset and had to gut it out. What did it take to get her ready to go today?

KAREN WEEKLY: It's no secret that Ashley has had a lot of injuries in her career. Ashley is as good as Ashley's going to be, but Ashley at 100 percent, before any of these

injury problems started, that's something that's pretty darn special.

You see what she did today, even though she's not 100 percent, she's just so mentally tough, and she just loves this university, this program, these girls so much, that she's just going to give them everything she has.

I don't know that it takes a whole lot. It takes rest. It takes treatment. More than anything, it's Ashley's intestinal fortitude and just her desire to play, give these girls everything she's got.

Q. Coach, you mentioned yesterday that was not Tennessee softball, what you saw yesterday. Was there something you told the players or players spoke between that game and today? Obviously you played a much cleaner game today. Then my second part, talk about the atmosphere and the great fan support you've gotten here from your fans and alums like Monica Abbott.

KAREN WEEKLY: That's been so cool to see them. Some of them came early and had to go back for family and work obligations. Some of them got to come yesterday. Some of them showed up today.

Our alums are amazing. Our alumni events are -- so many people attend, and it's so much fun. All season long, the messages they've sent this team just how proud they are of them, it's just been really cool to see.

That fuels you, when your fans are here crazy like they are, the locals, the alums, that fuels you, and you want to make them proud.

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