

2023 Women's College World Series

Monday, June 5, 2023

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Stanford Cardinal

Coach Jessica Allister

NiJaree Canady

Alana Vawter

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma - 4, Stanford - 2

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with Stanford's press conference. We'll start with an opening statement from Stanford's head coach Jessica Allister, and then go to questions for players NiJaree Canady and Alana Vawter.

JESSICA ALLISTER: What a great season. What a great run at the end. I couldn't be more proud of the work that our group did this year, and I think at -- when you take a look at where this program was when our fifth-year seniors came in and where this program is now, what Taylor Gindlesperger, Emily Young, and Emily Schultz gave to the program is unbelievably amazing.

For them to buy in and be on this big stage and competing the way we're competing today, I will forever be grateful for them.

I think that could have been a championship game. I think that could be a championship best-of-three series. But just incredibly proud of the work we put together, proud of these two women next to me, and it's just been a joy of a group to coach.

I love them all, and I'm incredibly proud of them.

Q. NiJaree, if you could walk us through the at-bat to Jennings there in the ninth and the way that played out. Also just in general, what do you take away from this experience and this week and your performance especially in these two games against OU?

NIJAREE CANADY: Definitely not the outcome we wanted. I mean, we're back at the World Series. I feel like that was the goal. We got here. That was a taste, and

now we're going to come back hungry.

Q. NiJaree, two similar games, you really shut them down into five innings, then they got you a little bit in the fifth inning of both of your appearances. Was both these games similar in terms of the way you were able to control the game, and then sort of what got away from you in the last inning of each game?

NIJAREE CANADY: Yeah, I feel like the more hitters kind of see a pitcher, the more the odds could tip in their favor. I feel like that's something to work on in the off-season, just getting stronger and working on endurance.

Q. NiJa, what did you learn about yourself and the future for you over the last five days?

NIJAREE CANADY: I think that I can play at this level. Coming in, like I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know -- we get Oklahoma right off the bat, and now I know like I can -- for the most part, I can pitch to any team in the nation.

JESSICA ALLISTER: For the all part (laughter).

Q. Alana, when you guys split (audio interruption) helping her see what's going on and know what worked for you and those kinds of things?

ALANA VAWTER: Yeah, I mean, sometimes -- I didn't do that today because I didn't really know the answer, but sometimes I say what the strike zone is so I can kind of like give you the idea there.

Other than that, we'll talk about it batter to batter. Coach Nyberg does a great job with understanding if the batter was cheating for a certain pitch or what their plan was and being able to change based off rise ball, drop ball, and that in general is just what really is super cool.

Q. You're a veteran, outstanding pitcher, and then this rookie from Topeka shows up. What were your first impressions of her? And however many months later, what are your impressions now?

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ALANA VAWTER: Yeah. So I hit. So in the fall, I've never seen a ball move like that in my whole entire life. I guess I move the ball a different way, which I guess could be some type of movement itself. But, yeah, up to bat, I've never seen a pitcher better.

Now watching her thrive this season, it's been the coolest thing ever. And now working through an injury and the kind of confidence she can bring to the team as a freshman. I thought I had to pave a way as a freshman too, but watching her do it too is just the coolest thing ever.

Q. One more for both of you. A lot of pitchers have gone up against this lineup, and it's relentless and they've talked about that. You guys have limited them more than most. Still, what is it like to face a lineup like that where there's power even at the bottom of the lineup?

ALANA VAWTER: I can start. I think that, yeah, they make good adjustments. They're good hitters. I think today personally I didn't have my best game, and I think you have to have your best game against them. With that said, yeah, credit to Oklahoma. They're good.

NIJAREE CANADY: Same thing. They're a really good team, good hitting team. I know like I didn't have my best game either, but I know next year we can come back, and the story can be different.

JESSICA ALLISTER: I'd like to add in before they leave, because I'd like them both to hear me say this. That's what makes them special. It's not easy as a senior to come in and all of a sudden have your workload change just a little bit and to share the stage.

And that's what makes A.V. one of the most amazing women that I've ever been around. The care that she takes of the entire pitching staff sets the tone, and you can hear in her answer there.

That's why we were able to do what we've done, and that's what makes our program what it is.

And then as far as NiJa over here, walking away thinking there's something I can be better at, that is unique and uncommon, and I just -- they are the backbone of our program, and I couldn't be more proud. Not just of them all year, but their performance here and the people that they are. You got a glimpse of it today.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Alana and NiJaree.

Q. Just want to ask you about that ninth inning decision to put Coleman on and get to Jennings, and

just the outcome and the result of the play.

JESSICA ALLISTER: I think we'd make the same decision again. Obviously hindsight is 20/20, and it didn't end up the way that we wanted it to, but we liked the matchup. At this point, you can't be careful. You've got to trust your gut and go with the best decision.

NiJa had been phenomenal against Jennings. Like NiJa said earlier, she is too -- I don't have the word, but she's not going to say that. That's a lot of at-bats against a hitter. At some point the scales are going to tip.

As gritty as she was tonight, I think it was the right call. Obviously we didn't get the outcome we wanted.

Q. Just following there, it's picking your poison between those two hitters. What within the matchup and with NiJa made that the move that you went with?

JESSICA ALLISTER: When we talked last time about how successful she's been against righties and then how successful she's been in the last two games. Yeah, you're absolutely picking your poison. They're as good of a one-two punch as anyone, and we just make the decisions that put us in the best position to be successful.

Q. Obviously Stanford softball back on the national stage, but the way NiJa has sort of emerged in the Super Regional against Duke, and now people tweeting about her, Instagram, all that sort of stuff. Did you guys have a sense of that as this was going on, just the waves she was making not only in the sport of softball but beyond?

JESSICA ALLISTER: Yeah, and I wouldn't say that just started in the Super Regional at Duke, if you watched the Pac-12 championship game and the performance she put together against UCLA, if you watched the Regional and the work she did against Florida twice, and then obviously the work she did against Duke.

None of this is a surprise to us. We've watched her all along, and we've watched her in the best conferences in the country as a freshman come in and just be lights out.

I think at times maybe we're playing the late games, I'm not sure, but it takes everybody a hot minute to see what's going on on the West Coast, but this is no surprise to us. So it's great to see the rest of the country catching on to what we've known from the start.

Q. You guys really came out in the bottom of the first inning and put some momentum down. What was kind of the message to the team at that point when you

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guys had a two-run lead but there's still a lot of game left obviously?

JESSICA ALLISTER: The message was just try to continue to put together good at-bats. We talked last night and again this morning about being brave, not perfect, and I thought we did a good job of that.

I thought we came out, got a good pitch to hit, put a good swing on it. Obviously we'd like to push a couple more runs. We thought we were going to need a couple more. But I thought we strung together good at-bats and tried to find a way to push another one across.

The message didn't change, and I thought we had opportunities. We got runners at second base with our right hitters up. A couple inches here and there, I think that outcome can look a lot different. I was proud of our tenacity. I was proud of our grit. I just couldn't be more proud of the team.

Q. This is probably an unfair question to ask you, but you guys have been one of the few teams to really take Oklahoma to the brink. What do you think it will take to beat this Oklahoma team?

JESSICA ALLISTER: Well, a timely hit. I don't think I watch back those games and think that there was no way for us to win either game. I think we can win both games, but we need to have a timely hit.

Like I said, and I told our players this, this isn't a dig, but we had the right hitters up. In order to beat a team of that caliber, it's going to take timely hitting.

I think we went toe to toe with them. I thought we played great games, and I think, like I said, an inch here, an inch there, that can be a very different outcome in both games.

Q. A little bit of a bigger picture question. When you came back to Stanford, you wanted to build it up, come back to the World Series. Well, now you've built it up. You're back at the World Series. I know right now in this moment, just after a loss, maybe not the best timing, but just for you, can you just quantify kind of realizing that first goal of building Stanford back into a powerhouse program?

JESSICA ALLISTER: It's great to be here. This is the goal, to be competing on this stage and to end your season one way or the next in Oklahoma City. It's not how we wanted to end our season in Oklahoma City, and I think that is a really important piece. We didn't come here to lose.

But the goal is to end your season in Oklahoma City, and to get Stanford back here and to compete on this stage is very, very gratifying.

When I took the job, I took the job because I believed that Stanford should compete for championships. There's a lot more that goes into that than just a belief. I'll say that our administration has been phenomenal and just jumped two feet in with what do you need for softball? Like let's get after it.

Part of my hiring process was a conversation with our athletic director, Bernard, in that, if we're going to do this, let's do it, and this is what it looks like.

I think probably over the last six years I have just gone back to him, back to him, back to him, back to him, and they've been all in. So the investment that the university has put into the program, I mean, we're building a \$50 million stadium. I don't know if I'm allowed to say that or not, but here we are.

(Laughter.)

It's going to be beautiful, and I'm thankful for that because this doesn't happen without that. You've got to be in alignment with your administration, and Stanford's all in.

Excited about the future. Excited about the educational opportunity that we can provide to our student-athletes. Excited about the national platform that the Stanford brand gives student-athletes.

It's just a really magical place, and I'm really happy to be the leader of this program.

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