

2023 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma Sooners
Coach Patty Gasso
Alyssa Brito
Jayda Coleman
Grace Lyons

Press Conference



celebrations that you have because women have worked so hard to get here yet still get judged for those things. That's the way we play, and that's what people enjoy. Or you don't. You either like it or you don't, but we're not going to apologize for these players knowing the game and celebrating it the right way.

Q. Grace, I want to start with you. As a veteran on this team, has been here for the other two championships, if you think back to when this tournament started, what did you guys need to work on to get back to this point? Patty, if you could speak to that too.

GRACE LYONS: I think it starts way back in the fall. The hard work we put in. We all know how hard our falls are, Battle Series, playing against each other, that's what sets the tone for the rest of the year.

If we know that we can compete at that high level in practice, the game comes naturally. You can see with a couple tough wins in postseason, just knowing how to compete with adversity and almost feeling like a loss but not actually losing, that's a really cool feeling for us to be challenged with early on in postseason.

Then now, now is when you've got to be gritty. We're tired. People can say that it's long days. Those are just excuses that people could have at this point in the season.

But we practice that in the fall, and I think now is just when we can go out and compete with the abilities that we've been given and not press too much because the hard work's already been put in.

PATTY GASSO: I think Grace said it best. I think October was a big time for us. To be honest, it hasn't been rosy and wonderful. In the fall, we had to learn a lot. I had to learn a lot. We had a lot of newcomers. I don't know if they even realize that. We had eight newcomers, and that's almost half of our team.

There was a lot of learning, a lot of getting to know each other. A lot of good leadership as well. A lot of expectations of what our program is like and newcomers and some kids from the portal coming into a new program

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started.

Q. This is for Alyssa and Jayda. You guys have a lot of energy, especially after walks sometimes. Sometimes you guys celebrate your walks maybe more than home runs. Where do you get that energy from, and how does that maybe rub off on your team, Patty, as well?

ALYSSA BRITO: I just think like, when you really think about the game, walks are so important. That's something that we stress, especially as an offense, of how getting runners on is runs.

So to us, we're going to celebrate it, and we're going to celebrate it really hard, and it's just as good as getting a base hit in my eyes.

When I bring energy like that, I think we all feel it. As a team, we're all collectively there, and we're on the same page of how important a walk is.

JAYDA COLEMAN: I think, when you know the game, you understand how big those walks come in handy, just like Tiare's double. Instead of scoring only Grace Lyons, I ended up scoring two. Now you're up two instead of just one.

Yeah, celebrating those little things is the same thing as getting a hit. I didn't get out. I didn't have to walk back to the dugout. So I'm first base, and that's all I need for my team.

PATTY GASSO: One thing I've told these guys is always be -- you must be unapologetic about the energy and the



that they're not used to. So we had a lot of work we had to get through in the fall, and I think, without question, paying off now.

Q. Coach, the off day is obviously something that's fairly new to the schedule. Can you talk a little bit about your team's schedule today, something you might be doing to keep the team focused, relaxed. Just step us through fairly quick on what the schedule looks like.

PATTY GASSO: This morning had a nice ice bath. They're awake. It's pretty chill really. We just -- we're here doing this, eat lunch. We're going to go back to Norman and get some practice and get into some video and so forth.

They've had a lot of time these last couple of days with their families, which I know is very important to them. Again, having a veteran group, a good group of leaders to make sure that everybody knows what they're doing and doing it the right way makes a big difference.

I give them a lot of -- I ask them, What do you guys want? How do you want to do it? I give them those options because they've been here and they know what works.

Q. Patty, February 8th of this year, you'd have been about to kick off your season in Irvine, California. If you think back to then, what was the question you had about this group for any confidence that you might have had? What was the question that needed to be answered for you at that point?

PATTY GASSO: What's wrong, you guys? What's going on? I think our first weekend there were just a lot of big eyes.

So we won. We played okay. But there was just -- the groove was different because we had always been playing against each other, and now we're all in one dugout, and it's just different. Like I guess we should have practiced all being in one dugout and what it felt like.

So it was not what I expected. I think they would tell you, if you look back, we got through some games, but we were not even close to being -- we were close to being ready, but we weren't, I would say our first weekend, completely ready.

We can look back and learn. We learned a lot of things. I had to learn a lot about them. They had to learn a lot about who's playing next to them because, when we're in those Battle Series or whenever I'm doing practice, a lot of times the full starting infield is not together. They're split in

half.

So I felt a little bit of, wow, this is newer. You feel a lot of newness on this team, but again, you just need time to allow these upperclassmen to lead them in a way they know this whole championship mindset process is supposed to look like.

Q. Put it to any of you guys, the players, to learn at this point. This particular season, what have you learned over the course of it?

GRACE LYONS: I think it's been cool to embrace so many different personalities. I don't think I've ever been on a team where there's so many unique people. I think we talked about this earlier this week of how everyone is so different but we all gel some way or the other. I think that has made it so much fun.

We may not be hitting as many home runs as last year and stuff like that, but we are making memories. We are gelling as a team. That's what makes this season super unique and something I'll never forget for my last season of just how we were able to gel so many different people together.

At this point, we're united, and we're excited for anyone to come through at any moment. Like that's where the trust that we've built comes into play. We're so excited for anyone's success. We have full confidence that anyone can do it -- pitchers, hitters, defense. Like we've got that trust with everyone.

JAYDA COLEMAN: Just to go on with what Grace was saying, I think we really needed to learn that it was us versus everyone. The only people that know what we go through is the 19 girls that are right next to me, and just the struggles we go through. We compete against each other all fall fighting for a spot, and even through the spring we're still fighting for a spot.

Sometimes it gets really competitive between us players, and just to understand that it is us 20 going against other teams. It's not us trying to go against each other. If you have that going against each other, you're not going to be successful.

So like she said, celebrating other people and always having their back, but I think really just understanding that it's us 20 versus everyone.

ALYSSA BRITO: One thing about this season that I've really noticed is how much joy we have as a team. I know Lyons touched on it a little bit, but this is honestly the most fun I've ever had.

Like she's saying, we have some of the craziest memories together, and it's some of those things that you look back on later in life and you're just so grateful. So I'm just so glad that this team was put together and all these great girls, like even with all the newness, it was like first weekend we were all playing volleyball together, just celebrating each other and having just so many good memories early on in the season.

Then when we get here on the field in the biggest stage, it's just like it's a party, and we're just having so much fun together.

I think that's where our joy comes from. You see that in all the big smiles we have on the field and just how much we love up on each other.

Q. Patty, a lot of us were there mid-March. Florida State came to Norman and how important that game was. How big was that game for this team in terms of your learning and growing? Was there ever a point where you start to realize, you know what, we might see this team again in the Championship Series?

PATTY GASSO: It's too early for me back then to even care about any of that except really worrying about our team. It was a good matchup. It was good for fans if you were watching. They're very well coached. They're hard working. They have some returners who have been through this. So they're very similar to us.

Am I surprised that we're both here? No. But they're very similar. But we're a different team than we were in March, as are they. So we're familiar with names and their style, but we've got to go back to the drawing board like we haven't seen them before.

Q. For the players, I know you talked about keeping the joy of the game, but I'm curious, it's a long season. You guys have had the target on your back the entire time, the win streak being number one. How do you handle the unique pressure that comes with it? How do you keep the joy for so long when anxiety seems like a thing that could very easily set in?

GRACE LYONS: The only way that you can have a joy that doesn't fade away is from the Lord, and any other type of joy is actually happiness that comes from circumstances and outcomes.

I think Coach has said this before, but joy from the Lord is really the only thing that can keep you motivated, just in a good mindset no matter the outcomes. Thankfully we've had a lot of success this year, but if it was the other way around, joy from the Lord is the only thing that can keep

you embracing those memories, those moments, those friendships, and all of that.

That's really the only answer to that because there's no other way softball can bring you that because of how much failure comes in it and just how much of a roller coaster the game can be.

JAYDA COLEMAN: 1,000 percent agree with Grace Lyons. I went through that my freshman year. I've talked about this before, but I was so happy we won the women's College World Series, but I didn't have joy. I didn't know what to do the next day. I didn't know what to do for the following week, but I didn't feel filled, and I had to find Christ.

I think that's what makes our team so strong because we're not afraid to lose. It's not the end of the world if we do lose. Yes, obviously we worked our butts off to be here and we want to win, but it's not the end of the world because our life is in Christ and that's all that matters.

ALYSSA BRITO: I think a huge thing that we've really just latched onto is eyes up. You guys see us doing this and pointing up, but we're really like fixing our eyes on Christ, and that's something where like they were saying, you can't find a fulfillment in outcome, whether it's good or bad.

I think that's why we're so steady in what we do and our love for each other and our love for the game because we know this game is giving us the opportunity to glorify God. I just think, once we figured that out and that was our purpose and everyone was all in with that, it's really changed so much for us.

I know myself, I've seen so much of a growth in myself with once I turned to Jesus and I realized how He had changed my outlook on life, not just softball, but understanding how much I have to live for, and that's living to exemplify the Kingdom, I think that brings so much freedom.

I'm sure everyone's story is similar, but we all have those great testimonies of really showing how awesome it is to play for something bigger. I think that's just what brings me so much joy. No matter the outcome, whether we get a trophy in the end or not, this isn't our home, and I think that's what's amazing about it. We have so much more. We have an eternity of joy with our Father, and I'm so excited about that.

Yes, I live in the moment, but I know this isn't my home, and no matter what, my sisters in Christ will be with me there in the end when we're with our King.

Q. Patty, you've got to keep your eyes on the prize and



really work with these players on their skill set, but I think from a human nature perspective it's easier to learn from failure and from losing than it is from winning. How do you stay on top of these players and keep improving throughout the year when there is that kind of challenge within there?

PATTY GASSO: I think they just gave you the answer. Again, they are unapologetic about the way they feel and what they believe. That makes my job easier because I'm with them in that. We're not looking at what could happen or, oh, the pressure. There is pressure, right?

But these guys have embraced it. They love it. They love the big moments because the big moments are the moments they'll never forget and how it happened. When we come back ten years from now, they're going to laugh and remember some fun times and so forth, but they just don't break because they have the right mentality about the way they play the game.

Q. Alyssa, with all the newcomers on this team, with you coming in as a transfer last year, was there anything in particular you learned about how to enter this program and adjust that you were able to pass on to other transfers this year?

ALYSSA BRITO: I had a lot of conversations with them obviously being in that spot. A big thing I had to learn was coming in you can't expect anything. This is such a unique program in the way that we have so much talent. There's a reason why you come here, and it's because people just elevate you, not just as a player, but as a person. Coming in, I knew I can't expect anything to be handed to me.

You have to work your butt off, but you also have to stay true to yourself. I think that's something that Coach really stresses when you come in. She's like, I'm going to let you be you, and that's exactly what we need from you. We don't need you to be anyone else.

There's obviously struggles, being a transfer. You're new. You're trying to figure it out. People are feeling you out. I think one thing I stressed is you don't need to be anyone other than exactly who you are. She wants that from you, and you don't have to prove yourself. There's a reason why you're here.

So that was kind of a big thing in a lot of the conversations that I've had with them.

Q. Is there anything in particular that you did in October, November, those early months that aren't so easy, to incorporate those new players?

PATTY GASSO: I think that Battle Series that we played was just a whole other level of -- it felt like to me two top ten teams playing against each other. So much so that OU took the liberty to put it on ESPN+, and there were a lot of people watching.

The Jordy versus Tiare matchup or the Nicole May versus Grace, I mean, there are matchups that you want to watch. So these were battles that was truly a battle, and there was trophies, and there were prizes, and there was all kinds of stuff affiliated with it.

But the best way that I could or our staff could create what it should feel like is having them go against each other and having the right leaders on each team to lead them into so-called battle. I think that was extremely valuable, and it was so competitive. There were sellout crowds for it in October. So that's taking the game to a whole other level.

Q. Grace, you guys faced off against Kathryn Sandercock a couple of years ago in the Champ Series and saw her this year. What about her makes her so challenging for you guys as a lineup?

GRACE LYONS: She's such a competitive pitcher. I think we've seen a lot of competitive pitchers this year, but she has a really cool just way she pitches. She does a lot of different things and keeps hitters on edge.

So I think we're just excited to get her best and Florida State's best because it's going to take a complete team on both sides to win a series.

It's not just one pitcher and it's not just one-hitter on our side or anything like that. So I think we're excited to bring complete teams on both sides and just compete against each other. I think it's just going to be a battle, just kind of the theme of the fall and all that, it's going to be a battle in June.

We're excited for that. We have seen them before, but also we can't treat it like we've seen them before. It's a brand-new team on both sides. So we're just excited to prepare and give them our best.

Q. Jayda, you guys have had some battles recently with Clemson and Stanford, where they're going down the wire and you guys have to find ways to make plays to win. How important were those experiences and you guys finding ways to win heading into this week? Patty, along those lines, how important is it for you as a coach to have those experiences and see players make plays going into this series?

JAYDA COLEMAN: Those games are the best games. I

won't forget that Clemson game, and I probably won't ever forget that Stanford game. Just knowing that we're never out of it. You all probably heard Hansen say that a billion times, but we're never out of it.

Just the fact that we get down to two strikes, two outs, and we can come through at any time, I think that just builds confidence in our team that, if we have another out, if we have another strike, we still have a chance. It doesn't matter what the score is.

Just having that confidence with each other. It doesn't matter who's up to bat. We have a freshman coming up to bat. Joce came up right after Tiare, and she could have easily gotten another base hit. But just knowing and having that confidence in each other.

PATTY GASSO: I would say the beauty of this team is they never panic and they always believe that whatever the circumstances, they're going to get through it.

I think Florida State feels the same way. That's why I think you're going to see a really outstanding Championship Series. It will be truly a battle, and there's a lot of things that are going to be at stake in the way of who can pitch better, who can get the timely hits, all those things.

This is not run rule territory here. It's just going to be fun. I tell you, these players love this stuff. They would rather have a team that looks like them and play against them than anything because we love when people can bring out our best, and Stanford did that and Clemson did that and lots of teams throughout the season, and we appreciate it because it makes us learn, makes us work.

There were a lot of people like, oh, gosh, I wish you had another loss so you could learn from it. What do you want, everyone go up there and just stand there, don't swing the bat? We can learn from close wins. We can learn from anything we do, if we choose to. We don't take winning for granted. We take lessons every time we play, and we make ourselves better.

Q. For each of the players, you heard Patty earlier talk about sort of being unapologetic and celebrating wins and the enthusiasm that you all played with. We've seen that here the last few years. How do you react to maybe some of the criticisms that go along with that? Do you feel like there is a double standard?

ALYSSA BRITO: I think we've seen so much on social media. I think the great thing is we can put our phone down and not even look at it. I think understanding that no one's ever going to be happy no matter what, you can't satisfy anyone. That's not why we play this game, and

that's not why we're here doing what we're doing is to satisfy anyone.

So I'm just -- I think for me I'm going to stay being who I am and stay true to who I am, and if that's that passion that I have offends anyone, it's just kind of like, okay. I'm not going to allow anyone to kind of change my game.

I think that's a huge thing that we stress here is there's a reason why we have an excellence and a standard here, and that's because we have never changed for anyone exactly who we are.

I think just carrying that mentality throughout this Champ Series and the rest of the way is a huge thing, but just not really feeding into what the negative talk is and focusing on the good things, and that's exactly in our circle and on this team.

JAYDA COLEMAN: I kind of talked about the double standard thing. I really don't get it. I think we continuously in softball itself are just breaking barriers. I've seen it with my own eyes. I feel like it's just very disappointing to just see people just trying to tear us down in that type of way.

Maybe not tearing us down, but just kind of making it into a negative light when you're seeing the MLB players doing the exact same thing, the NBA or the NFL throwing their helmets or having emotion. Why can't we have emotion? We're at the same stake as them. We're athletes just like them. Why can we not wear our emotions on our sleeves?

I just think that's kind of disappointing, and like she said, I try to stay off of social media because that would fire me up and make me just want to do it even more, to be honest.

No, it really disappoints me on the double standard and just seeing how male athletes slide with things and how female athletes don't. Hopefully that stuff will change very soon.

GRACE LYONS: I just think, kind of as the leader of this team and taking on all of our different personalities, we never mean it disrespectfully or against anyone else, like they're saying. It's in our circle. So what we do is to bring passion to our own circle, and it's never against anyone else.

So I just want to say that. That's not how we play. People may take it that way, but it's all for our own joy and passion, never to tear down anyone else.

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