

2024 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Florida Gators

Coach Tim Walton

Skylar Wallace

Kendra Falby

Press Conference



But yeah, I mean, we have a great friendship. We have a great amount of respect for each other. He's like a brother to me the way we kid each other. I sent him a picture yesterday morning and told him good morning. It was a picture of our old coach in a Gator hat.

He's amazing. He's obviously done a great job. He's worn so many different hats in this state, what he's meant to championship culture at the University of Oklahoma, now obviously at Oklahoma State.

I told Coach Holder when he hired him, You'd be lucky to have him. Sure enough, he's done a great job with that program, revitalizing it back to championship-level success. Tremendous amount of respect.

The game came about, he texted me on a Sunday morning around 11 and said, Hey, we got rained out. I said, We did, too. What do you think about playing?

Long story short, we ended up getting a top-20 matchup in less than 24 hours. ESPN+ covered it, SEC Network. About 1800 fans, I believe, and our support staff and work staff to get it right. They won on a two-strike, two-out home run. Both pitchers pitched well, Keagan and Lexi. Both offenses weren't that great, but we were two days off, both of us the same.

It was good. A great game. Something we actually needed, to be honest with you.

Q. Tim, you and Kenny were obviously both teammates with Ryan Minor. Could you share any stories on him, given his passing a few months ago.

TIM WALTON: Yeah, well, obviously Ryan is a legend to this state, high school legend, college legend, even obviously a Major League Baseball legend, replacing Cal Ripken at third base.

Ryan was a great friend, a great teammate. He and his brother Damon, mom, dad Dale. When I came on a recruiting, trip, they were amazing. His dad and I actually traded hats, to be honest with you, on my recruiting trip. It's kind of a cool thing. I don't know why I was wearing a

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Florida.

Coach, if you don't mind giving us an opening statement to start.

TIM WALTON: Thanks for having us here, and being here as well. Just appreciate obviously the state of Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma, All Sports Association, USA Hall of Fame, USA Softball.

Privilege and honor to be here. Really excited with this team because we have a fun bunch of athletes. I always get lost, but I think 11 of 'em are doing this for the first time with us, 10 first time here at the College World Series. 11 new players, some veterans. This is our motor here to our right. As they go, we go.

Just really, like I said, honored to be here. Looking forward to a great stay.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. The obvious question is you going against Kenny again. What is it like going against someone you're so close with? Can you give us the backstory about how the February game came together.

TIM WALTON: Yeah, obviously Kenny and I have a great friendship. His family, his mom, his dad, I mean, I know 'em all for a long time. We've been friends since I was 17 years old. Played ball together in California. We came to Oklahoma, won a championship together.

My wife and I lived with him when I got the job at Oklahoma as assistant coach. Short-term. We got the job at an odd time of the year, late January.



Long Beach hat, and he gave me a Sooners hat. We traded.

Great people. Ryan was a tremendous athlete. He's one of the best athletes I've ever seen. One of the coolest things ever is when -- took our baseball program, I remember the Monday night madness against Kansas, beating No. 1 Kansas, storming the floor, just what he meant to our athletic department.

Bringing a couple programs together, but more importantly there's the culture of that athletic department at Oklahoma at the time as a player. Great athlete, great friend, great person.

Miss him. I know obviously he's in a better place now just with the circumstances of his health down the road.

Q. Being from Florida, Lexi being from Florida, did you know her in high school at all, play against her? Also the challenge of hitting her. What are the challenges about that matchup?

KENDRA FALBY: Yeah, so, Lexi's mom is actually my sister's godmother, so we go way back.

I mean, she's a really good pitcher. I've faced her since the days that I started playing softball. Obviously kudos to her.

We're excited to take her on tomorrow night.

SKYLAR WALLACE: Yeah, going off Kendra, she mixes speeds well. She hits the zone well. She attacks her batters. I think you have to be really good about staying your approach with her, finding good pitches to hit.

Every pitcher makes a mistake at some points, so we have to capitalize on those mistakes. We are excited to get after it tomorrow.

Q. Tim, does Lexi remind you of anyone specifically when you watch her?

TIM WALTON: I've seen her pitch since she was -- I won't say little, she's always been a monster of a pitcher in the circle. She's just been good.

I got to see her brother pitch, too. My son played ball against him. I've known the family for a long time, too, like Kendra.

I don't really have somebody that I can say she reminds me of this. Maybe a Keira Goerl from UCLA back in the day, similar to, heavy drop ball, multiple speeds, doesn't

give up a lot of hits. It's really hard to compare her.

Her style is unique. Even her pitches, she has what we would call a backdoor screwball, which is not something a lot of people can throw. Her hand size, things like that. She's a good competitor, good pitcher.

Q. The agreement involving the NCAA and the conferences last week paves the way for schools to pay athletes directly. We've seen the growth in softball. This development can affect that. Big picture, do you worry this change could divert funds from softball to paying football players, or do you believe there's enough momentum in the sport that this could be beneficial?

TIM WALTON: I think, number one, I'm not skilled to answer that on that many levels.

I think the beauty of being a college softball coach, being a coach and a mentor to my young people, I hope it benefits them.

My greatest fear for a long time has just been at what point in time is our model sustainable for all sports, coaches, programs across the country. That's my biggest concern.

I do believe we're heading down a path that's going to be probably a lot more equivalent for males and female athletes alike. But how many of them? I think that's the biggest question that I would have.

Q. Kendra and Skylar, going through the SEC gauntlet, how does it prepare you for this stage? At what point this season did you see the qualities of this team come together?

SKYLAR WALLACE: I mean, I had the belief back in August, September when we first started coming together as a team. We've been climbing this hill for a while now. I knew we had the grit, the talent, the competitiveness to be here today and this week.

But the SEC prepares you just because you're playing a very competitive schedule. Every team is out to beat the Gators so you have to be on your A game all the time. We're prepared as much as we possibly can. Just super excited for this week.

KENDRA FALBY: Same thing for what Skylar said. It's been a grind all season. The SEC schedule we had this year was super tough.

I think what really pushed us was the Georgia series. What we were able to do in that game, how we came back

and fought, I think that was the momentum push. Florida State, that game was crazy. From there on.

I think that's really when we were, Okay, we have good momentum going into the post-season.

Q. Tim, transfer is a big part of everybody's program. You got one of the best ones in Jocelyn Erickson. Talk about what impact she's had on your team this season.

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I think when you look at transfers across the country in all sports, there's probably been some transfers that haven't been the best fit for programs or transfers for the wrong reasons or other things.

We really tried to do our homework as much as possible in the people we bring in. Make sure, number one, they're the right person, they fit with our culture. The academic component obviously is important to me.

Honestly, Jocelyn has been a fit from day one, right away. Just the way she goes about her work ethic, the way she goes about just who she is, her competitiveness. She's been a phenomenal addition.

If you do this right, Skylar transferred to us, as well, transfers sometimes are actually better than high school recruits because they already know what they either didn't have or do have or want. There's a lot of things that can be on a plus.

I've always been an advocate if the kid needs to go somewhere. We had a couple kids leave our program last year that had fantastic seasons this year. Again, I helped pave the way for that. We talked about what they wanted and what their goals were.

Jocelyn came in with the goals day one of what she wanted to be. It's my job to figure out how we're going to pave that way and get her there. Then most importantly, she's a great teammate and a great leader and competitor on the field. She's done a great job with our young pitchers of keeping them and holding them accountable to things they need to do because she has the experience that they were searching for.

She's been a fantastic addition culturally on and off the field.

Q. I think it's been 10 years since you started wearing the sunflowers. To still wear them, Heather has been gone 10 years, can you talk about why you have continued? How has that story been shared?

TIM WALTON: We have an award that the players vote

on. It's not coaches driven. That's the Heather Braswell Above and Beyond Award that sits in the locker. Heather has a locker in the locker room. We have 25 locker spaces, and one of those is a Sunflower Saturday locker.

We try to do as good of a job every single year of telling the story. But we still have a young kid named Hartley. Hartley Georges is an adopted Friends of Jaclyn kid in our program. She comes back and throws out our first pitch, wears her jersey, some other cool things. It's a really cool story.

Skylar and Katie Kistler are the ambassadors to Hartley, and all of our players on our team with their own money buy presents for Hartley and her little brother Carter.

But Terri Braswell has season tickets, sits right behind home plate. We have a Sunflower Saturday section, I don't know how many shirts there were this Saturday against Baylor. A creamy yellow shirt this year. Really cool.

The main thing is when Kelsey Horton approached me a long time ago that the girls wanted to go from ribbons and bows in their hair to a created sunflower about 12 years ago now. 10 years now I think running we've been wearing the yellow one. We used to wear a white one, a blue one and an orange one. Now it's shifted over to yellow.

You see it all over the country. When I go out and recruit, they're everywhere now. I think that's the cool thing. Talking to Denis Murphy, the founding father of Friends of Jaclyn program, which is aligning a player with a program.

We've been able to give kids that are fighting for their lives with pediatric cancer a smile for the day, but more importantly our athletes. The game is the game, it's part of life.

Q. Mike White said it's a huge advantage for the World Series to always be here for Oklahoma and floated the idea of having it rotate. I wanted your thoughts on that.

TIM WALTON: Well, I knew in a couple years the World Series is in Columbus, Georgia, rightfully so with the Olympics starting in '96, the first ever softball starting in the Games.

I don't believe the games need to move from Oklahoma. I think now we've been here 40 years. The community, the state, it's something that people look forward to. The economic impact we heard last night as a group is just great, awesome.

My only thing was just trying to get this similar to Omaha,



down in Bricktown or somewhere like that where the kids, the families, the fans can have a little bit more of an atmosphere. Not to say that this stadium isn't a great stadium. It is. Just the atmosphere they have at TD Ameritrade downtown and some of that stuff is different. I've been there once. We just don't have that here.

I'll tell you this. My wife has been on my butt for two days how do we get a parking pass. She said, How am I going to get there? You don't understand. It's packed.

Get on the bus.

Long story short, it would be able nice to walk to your hotel after the game from Bricktown. But it's here. It needs to stay here. It's been here 40 years. This is the place where it needs to be.

Q. Tim, we've been talking about it a couple years. Sooners and Longhorns headed to the SEC as soon as this tournament is over. What are they in for? What are you in for?

TIM WALTON: We got 'em both on our schedule next year at home, so that will be interesting.

Yeah, I think at the end of the day everybody talked about, You got these two teams. Obviously they're great programs led by great coaches, have great athletes.

It's just different. It's just different. It's just different. The SEC is different. I thought we were good, then we get our butts kicked by somebody one weekend. Gosh, it's tough. The travel, the fans, the passion, the number of fans. It's just different.

I'm excited that they're coming to the SEC. I think they're going to expand recruiting bases for their programs, our programs, the television coverage, popularity. We've already been the number one RPI conference in the country. Now we're going to be the number one star.

It's going to be a challenge. We're in for a challenge. They're in for a challenge. Tennessee had a fantastic SEC season, they really did. I think we lost seven games in one series and we're second place. There's no longer going to be an undefeated or one-loss SEC champion. It's going to be multiple losses.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for Florida.

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