

2024 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, May 29, 2024
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Oklahoma State Cowgirls
Coach Kenny Gajewski

Lexi Kilfoyl
Jilyen Poullard
Caroline Wang

Press Conference



I mean, I miss being around him a lot, to be very honest. But it's really cool to be able to showcase his team and our team on this stage, and to be able to do that is just an incredible thing.

Just thankful for the doors that he opened. I'm thankful to be out of his tree. I mean, it's really cool. It really makes me proud.

I can tell you this. When he texts me, it means a lot. When it calls, it means a lot. So it's really cool.

Q. Do you remember who called who first back in February when you arranged that game down in Florida? When you talked, was there any doubt it was going to happen?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I'll take the credit. I did. I called. Might as well get some. It's good.

I called him. I just said, Hey, I know this is probably a long shot.

One thing I've learned under him is don't ever play a game after an off day. Like, don't ever play on a Tuesday when Monday is your off day. I knew when I called him, he's not going to want to play. I don't want to play. We both needed to play.

I reached out and said, Hey, it's a long shot, but we're here, willing to come to you. We're both in the same boat. We've both been on an off day. None of us have an advantage. I'd love to come play at your place.

I knew right away when he texted me back, I probably have it in my phone, but it was like, Hey, give me five.

And it was probably for him to kind of go through his mind. He's calculated and smart. I think he was probably trying to look through it all and go, Okay, does this make sense?

He called back and said, Let me see what I can do. He goes, I want to play, so let me start to run it up the ladder.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Oklahoma State.

If we could start with an opening statement, Coach.

KENNY GAJEWSKI: It never gets old to walk back into this room. Super thankful to be able to lead these guys here, three just incredible kids. I'm excited to just hear them here today. This is about them. This is about the program. It's about the Cowgirl way. We're excited to put that on display again in front of the whole country.

We love this group. It's been maybe the most amazing journey I've been on since my first year here in 2016. For sure have had the most fun I've ever had with this group. Just what they bring to the table every single day.

I'm excited to be back and looking forward to tomorrow night. Just wish it wasn't against my best friend.

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

Q. You and Tim go way back. He was saying he was 17. Do you remember when you first crossed paths with him? What's the conversation been like as this became a reality?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: Yeah, I can probably recall one of the first nights I got really close to Tim. I probably can't tell you all the details here. Yeah, I have to protect him, and me as well (smiling).

The one thing I can tell you about T-Dub, he's loyal (tearing up). I mean, he gave me a shot to get back in. I'm just thankful. He's just a great friend. God, I don't want to cry. He's just a good man. He's always shot me straight.



Somebody wrote a story at the time on it. It was really good. Very detailed on the time frame. Within a few hours, we had a game set.

It's no joke. Trying to get our universities to move is tough at times because you're dealing with not just fans but people to work, people to get concessions open, all of stuff that goes into it. It's not just playing a game.

Again, to get umpires is wild. But he made it happen. We tried to do everything we could to help that. It was cool.

Q. Lexi, what's been the biggest adjustment you've had to make from being one of the aces to being the ace?

LEXI KILFOYL: Honestly, I feel like the coaches help me along the way. Coach G and I kind of had that conversation over the summer where he was, Hey, you're going to be our ace this year. I know you don't want to be called that. You don't even have to be called that to be an ace. You just have to go out there and do your job.

I don't like the term "ace" because I know a pitching staff, it takes every single one of us. That was one of our things this year, we were going to use all of us.

I mean, just playing my game, with the support of my teammates, support of the coaches. I think if I put that term aside, I think you naturally fall into that place.

Q. Kenny, how is Ivy coming along? How important is she going to be alongside Lexi this week? For the players, what has your experience been being here, seeing the facility?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I think Ivy is doing good. We made it a point. We practiced just like we practiced all year. We took Sunday off. We had a good practice on Monday. We stayed home an extra day. Practiced on Tuesday. Had some live situations. Ivy threw what I would call like a live bullpen, which we haven't been doing the whole last three to four weeks. Her bullpens have been scarce. We've been trying to manage the pain and manage her rib.

We said, Hey, we're going to have to go at it now. We're going to have to really go.

Carrie thought she threw extremely well. She had some timing issues a week ago from not pitching enough. You imagine you have a broken rib, it doesn't really hurt to throw but it hurts to breathe. When your timing's off - Lexi can tell you this - if you ever create the kind of arm speed these guys do, you graze your rib cage with your elbow when you come through, you have a broken rib, that was

starting to happen because her timing was off the, like a hitter's timing could come off.

I think it led to a little bit of inconsistency against Arizona. I still think she gutted it out and got what we needed. I don't think she's anywhere close to what she's been.

I think getting her this extra work again has been really good.

JILYEN POUILLARD: Can you remind me the question? I'm sorry.

Q. (No microphone.)

JILYEN POUILLARD: Oh, my God, it has been amazing. I think anyone who talks to me, I think I put a lot of emphasis on, Hey, man, I'm living the dream. A lot of times I say, I just feel like I'm dreaming still. I come from somewhere that I played for four years. This was only a dream. It just felt so far out of reach, kind of out of touch.

For this to be my fifth year and finally being able to experience it for myself, not just watch it, it's awesome. It's everything that I could have imagined.

CAROLINE WANG: I definitely feel the same. I talked to Coach G I think yesterday. He was, How are you feeling? I was like, It feels like it's so exciting, but I don't think it's really set in. It almost doesn't feel like it's real yet for me.

Q. Kenny, you've talked about how much fun you've had with this group. What specifically about this group has made it the most fun you've ever had?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: We just have this unique circumstance. We have so many young kids. Let's start out with this. We have so many new people, after four years of having a lot of the same kids. I think, like last year, it was so awesome. All I could think about the whole year was getting those kids back here to try to do what they wanted.

At one point it didn't look like it was going to happen. I think we lost 11 of 13 late. We hadn't lost barely at all up till that point. It was wild.

Getting here was such a relief. I was worn out. Those kids gave us everything we had every day, right? Just getting 'em back was all I could think about, try to work for, stay up at night.

Then we start over in a weird way. Not completely over, but we start over with a lot of new pieces. Talent, great kids, great families. Like, I think I was honest, up front,

we're talented enough to get back to OKC, zero question. I just don't know how we're going to look, how we're going to respond.

We have a third baseman that hasn't played third base in college. We have a shortstop that we moved to shortstop with a week before the season had started. Never played shortstop. We have a second baseman who all she's done is waiting for four years to come here to shortstop, we're moving her to second base. We have a first baseman who never played first base, ever. Now she's playing first. Caroline is new. Jil is new.

I'm like, Who are we? I think we're really good, but I don't know when we get punched how we're going to respond.

From the first weekend, the second weekend, watching these guys respond was, like, We're dang good fast.

They're so much fun. They've never had a bad day. They just answer the bell. I've got a new staff, fairly new staff. Really young. They need coaching, too.

But, man, they've been coaching me. It's just like all this newness has been fresh. We probably have the best synergy in this program that we've ever had. That's no knock on any person, anyone, it's just magical. I don't know how that happened. I feel like the most luckiest guy on earth. I should be doing a Dos Equis commercial right now. Honestly, that's how I feel.

It's just been fun.

Q. Coming off a season in which you whacked them around a little bit, how does that change the dynamic if you meet later in the year? Is your confidence level higher and the fact that they're on their way out?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I don't think it really matters. It's different. It's a new day and nothing really matters at this point. It's just whoever's next.

I can tell you this. Like, this team doesn't fear anyone. I don't think they're really worried about who's in front of them; however, we respect everyone here in a major way. We respect their coaching abilities, the way they do things.

We're just like we've always been. I know it sounds like coach speak, but I feel like if we play the very best we can play, I don't think there's anybody that can play with us. That's how we feel.

LEXI KILFOYL: From a player's perspective, it does give you a little bit of confidence knowing that we can look back at those games, pull out all the good, try to do that again.

Like Caroline and I were talking earlier. We've played four of these teams and we've beaten all of them. It definitely gives us a boost of confidence to go out there and know if we play our best ball that we can beat 'em.

Q. I'm driving down the road yesterday and I'm listening to a national sports radio show. They're reading off the odds to win this in Vegas. People are betting on softball. We know the popularity of the sport. Does that cross your mind? Do you know you're two-run favorites in Vegas?

KENNY GAJEWSKI: I did not know that. I'm not shocked. I'm not a big better, so it doesn't really interest me a whole lot. But I know that is for a lot of people.

I will tell you I think it's cool, as long as these guys are staying away from that kind of stuff. What it does is it's just going to drive more interest. People are going to be watching.

It tells you I think the trajectory of this sport, the trajectory of the female student-athlete. I think I have the best job in the country coaching softball. It's wild that we can be doing this and be in a room like this. It's just crazy.

I think our sport is just really growing. I think you're seeing that and feeling that all over. Whether that's good stuff or bad stuff, that's not really for me to say, as long as our kids are not involved in that stuff. That's the only negatives I see in that. There's no reason for these guys to be involved in that kind of stuff, obviously.

I think we have enough problems around.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for Oklahoma State.

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