

2024 Women's College World Series

Thursday, May 30, 2024

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Florida Gators

Coach Tim Walton

Katie Kistler

Keagan Rothrock

Kendra Falby

Postgame Press Conference



Florida 1, Oklahoma State 0

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida.

We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

TIM WALTON: What a great game. Kind of a good old-fashioned softball game. Something we haven't seen in a long time. Really excited.

Again, the energy was great. The crowd was great. A lot of these guys doing it for the first time. It was really exciting. Just proud of them. Previous it's just cool to see the kids on this stage. Kendra making a Gold Glove-type play, Keagan pitching a gem, and Katie with a two-strike bomb. She said to the ESPN people, I've never done this before. You haven't hit a game-winning home run before at the College World Series.

Pumped for our program, pumped for our fans. A big-time win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Katie, what was that moment like trotting around the bases?

KATIE KISTLER: Honestly, I think I blacked out a little bit. I don't really remember much of that, running the bases. All I felt was just straight joy looking at my teammates, everybody jumping up and down. I was happy to do it for my team and Keagan, as well, pitching her butt off that game.

Q. Kendra, if you could take us through the fly ball.

KENDRA FALBY: Yeah, I mean, right now I'm not really doing what I want to up to bat. My main focus is going out on the field, continuing to keep a positive mindset. Keagan has been pitching amazing. Just going out there and being like I'm going to catch every ball. That's all I was focused on. Like everything kind of just went, sound, and then it was just me and the ball. All I thought about was catching at that moment. I wanted to keep the game 0-0 again for Keagan because she was pitching amazing.

Q. Keagan, what was your mentality on the mound tonight?

KEAGAN ROTHROCK: I would say, like, my biggest thing was making sure that I'm hitting my locations. I think the minute that it starts getting over the plate more, that's when you see the harder base hits start happening. For me, it was trying to get groundballs to my defense, weak pop flies, giving them something they can field. That way when we go in on the offense, they have more of a chance.

Q. Keagan, you faced Oklahoma State earlier this year. How did that help you for today?

KEAGAN ROTHROCK: I think honestly it calmed my nerves a lot just because it was an opponent I'd already seen, batters that I've already thrown to. Outside of, I think, the lead-off batter. For me, it was calming my nerves.

I think it was a great first College World Series game.

Q. Keagan, what was today like for you? Is there a moment when just the reality of everything you were going through, when it hit you?

KEAGAN ROTHROCK: I don't really think it's hit yet, honestly. I mean, today's just been about having fun with my teammates and doing everything for each other, just going out there and doing what we do best.

Q. Katie, your coach said you told ESPN you'd never really done that before. Is that one of the hardest hit balls?



KATIE KISTLER: I mean, honestly, might be. I don't really recall my past hits, analytics and stuff. It might be. Felt like it, for sure.

Q. What kind of intel were you sharing with each other about maybe how to finally solve Lexi in some way?

KENDRA FALBY: The talk in the dugout was really positive, keep putting pressure on the defense. We're hitting balls hard, but right to her. Keep finding the bottom of the ball. I felt like the talk throughout all of our team was really well, everyone had good energy. The dugout was never down. We knew if we kept pounding her, something would come through.

KATIE KISTLER: We all lean on each other. Right before Coach Walton was just making small adjustments in the at-bats and stuff. I think that has helped us and it improved our at-bats and had quality at-bats towards later in the game.

Q. Katie, talk about that home run. What was able to be the key breaking through?

KATIE KISTLER: Just knowing my approach and sticking to that, sticking to what pitches I know I like to swing at. Just having a good, small adjustment in the box helped. Also having my teammates to lean on also helped me keep a positive mindset going from my first at-bat to my second.

I just wanted to see ball and hit ball, as we say, just have fun with it.

Q. What was the mindset after you came off the field?

KENDRA FALBY: Just continue to play Gator softball. There was nothing we needed to change in that moment. The whole game was going good. Keagan was pitching great. Our defense was doing good. At that point there was nothing that we needed to make a major change. We knew keep doing what we're doing and we're going to be fine. That's what we did.

KATIE KISTLER: I remember at the beginning of the game I overheard Coach Walton say, It's just a softball game. That helped me calm down a lot. Just going out there knowing what we know how to do, doing, that it will pay off.

KEAGAN ROTHROCK: Going off of what Kendra said, going out there and not really needing to make a change because they hadn't really done anything major yet. For me, that was making sure I hit my spots, hit the level with the spot, just really making sure I'm getting a weak out to my defense so they can defend.

THE MODERATOR: That will do it for questions for players. We'll continue with questions for Coach.

Q. What were y'all able to do obviously with Keagan to slow down the offense?

TIM WALTON: To her point, to her credit, just being able to understand how to change speed. She threw a changeup really well tonight. She did a really good job with her rise ball. Hadn't had a ton of strikeouts on her rise ball. Later in the season she's been getting better, taking it to another level. Got a big strikeout early in the game on an elevated rise.

I think she just was really throwing the ball on the edges of the plate. Changing speeds, velocities. Looking on the board, 58 all the way up to 71 on the boards. I thought she did a really good job of changing, mixing it up. To her credit again, it's all about her location.

Q. How impressive is it for her to have really two quality outings against a good ballclub?

TIM WALTON: Really good. I mean, other than a two-out, two-strike, three-run homer the first time we played, she pitched a really good game then, too.

I thought she did a really good job. Again, to her point and her credit, being able to understand that they weren't getting extended. I think we had two hard-hit balls extended on that she was getting in on their hands, under their hands, changing speeds, changing levels.

Again, she's a national Player of the Year for a reason a couple years ago. She's got some good stuff. She's just been getting better and better and better. I'm proud obviously of just her resilience and her ability to continue to keep getting better.

Q. You have a lot of power hitters on this team. How impressive was it to see Katie do what she did?

TIM WALTON: You got me in trouble with my wife about the quote the other day about the parking. I'll give you that one first (smiling).

It was impressive. Obviously Reagan struck out the previous at-bat. Katie did a pretty good job. To her point, we're writing stories. It was a different bat that she used from the other at-bat. Really cool to see some things in the dugout that you really work on, you really hope you can make small, little adjustments. I can tell you we made 19 other adjustments that didn't work, but that one did.

Really just cool for her to be able to have that moment. I'll tell you what, I would tell you that anybody on our team, if there's anybody that they would run through a wall for, it would be Katie. She's just an amazing kid, amazing person, gone through a lot in her life. She's just a cool kid. I'm proud of her for that moment.

I'm glad she said she blacked out because it looked like she blacked out as she's running around the bases. I have my place that I stand. She's still between first and second. Other than a cartwheel, she's spinning around, having a good time. It's great to see her have that kind of moment at the College World Series. Really proud of her.

Q. With Lexi and that heavy drop, is there something you can do as a lineup to hit that, or do you have to wait for her to miss?

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I mean, when she's getting Skylar Wallace to hit groundballs to third, I don't know if she's hit a groundball to third all year. That tells you about her late break, her action, her stride length and the movement of the pitch.

If there's ever a pitch -- left-handers hit a lot higher batting average against her than right-handers because it does, at times, come back. Just the way her hands are, how long her fingers are. She spins the heck out of it.

We practiced. We've been practicing for Lexi for a while. You can see just how hard it is to actually do it when you're 6'2", 6'3" probably. Really, really rotates true. It's a really good spin. I think on the analytics it's almost 10 inches a break. It's a lot.

Q. We saw two freshmen tonight win ballgames. I don't know if that's a trend. Are you seeing something out of arms that enables them to make an impact like that early?

TIM WALTON: I think it's hard to do. I think the circuit that these young people play in is pretty dang good. The coverage, look at the press conference that we had leading into this, the amount. We had a packed house of media at our place at home.

I think the sponsorships and the ability for them to play in multiple tournaments and big All-Star games, it's getting bigger and bigger and bigger. As they go through their process, they're not fazed as much because they've been asked a ton of questions. Keagan has been doing interviews for a long time. She's well-versed, does a really good job with the calmness about her.

I think there's a lot of kids, especially on the circuit, we'll

call them five-star kids, really good ones. They play a really strong schedule. I think it does prepare them a little better.

Q. Your players credited you to calm down a little bit, it's just a softball game. Easy thing to say, not easy to believe. When you're telling them that, can you tell when they're getting it?

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I mean, now that we won a game in the College World Series, we were terrible last week, we were nervous, played bad. We got better as the week went on. We were bad. Just really nervous, doing a lot of things.

I don't know if it's the home pressure of a super regional. This week we've been amazing. It's a totally different team. I know it didn't show up on the offensive statistics today. We've been practicing every day since we've been here. It's been a lot better.

I think that you can see subtle adjustments. Kids look me in the eye, they shake their head. I tell them I want you to use a 34-inch bat steady of 33. Okay, whatever you say.

For the most part, everybody in that dugout looks at me and trusts what we're doing. Then I think on the flip side of that, what Katie said, we're not doing crazy stuff. We practice a lot of stuff. When you face good pitchers that have All-American in front of their name, you're going to have to sometimes do some things that are maybe a little bit uncomfortable.

Kendra had some good adjustment bats late in the game, hit the ball hard, just got out. I think overall they did a good job trusting themselves number one. That's the key. My job is to try to instill confidence in them. That's what I really try to do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports