

# 2024 Women's College World Series

Tuesday, June 4, 2024

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**Florida Gators**

**Coach Tim Walton**

**Skylar Wallace**

**Kendra Falby**

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma 6, Florida 5

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida. We will start with an opening statement by Coach Walton.

TIM WALTON: Yeah, congratulations to Oklahoma. Obviously a really, really tough fight from them coming back from yesterday.

I think my main message here is, think about our team, just how proud I am of them through the season. The ups and the downs of competition.

I think the turning point for me was getting run ruled in the middle of the week by your rival and turning around the very next game and run ruling your other rival. To me that was the turning point in our season, just being able to have the ability to turn the page really quickly, be very resilient, find a way to continue to just care for one another on the team and the program.

Obviously these two up here have been an instrumental part of our success this season and the previous three seasons, our previous two seasons with them together.

Our young kids did a really good job just buying into the program, what it takes to be a Gator, the work ethic, all the necessary ingredients to being a great teammate and great person.

It's not easy when you have to end your season any time, this is the last time we'll all be together, but it does make it a little bit sweeter to be at the College World Series and see our players find a way to get back to this stage, showcase their talents, make the entire Gator Nation and the University of Florida really proud of them.

I'm super proud. I know a lot of people are as well. Thanks for having us here. Obviously some made-for-TV-type drama stuff the last few days. I wouldn't have it any other way for these guys. They've showed that they can take a punch and punch back. So I'm really proud of our team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

**Q. You had it going offensively early on. Did she change up anything she was doing to hold you down?**

SKYLAR WALLACE: Yeah, Maxwell is a really good pitcher. She started mixing her speeds, changing eye levels, moving across the plate, too. Just really keeping us on our toes.

I think we started getting a little out of balance and chasing some pitches. But she did a really good job of being deceiving at pitches and just really locating really well.

So you have to tip your hat. She got gritty those last four innings or so, just got after it, unfortunately. We just didn't come out on top with that.

**Q. Could you talk about Keagan. She throws all the pitches the last two days, then so many today. What was it like being behind her?**

KENDRA FALBY: I mean, I don't even have words. There's only so much you can ask of a freshman. She's not even a freshman. I don't consider her a freshman like whatsoever. Keagan came out and did everything and more for us.

I couldn't have asked anything more. I mean, she stunned Oklahoma for two days. You haven't seen that at all. She's only going to get better. I can't thank her enough for everything she's done.

She wanted the ball. She would have fought Coach Walton if he would have not put her in today. Keagan is a gamer. She wants the ball. She's a competitor. Playing defense behind her is so much fun because that's what we want to do, we want to be making those crazy plays for



her. She does some crazy things for us.

I can't say more than what I just said. Like Keagan is amazing.

SKYLAR WALLACE: So proud of the way she developed and grew as a woman, just the way she got tougher. She really trusted herself and developed herself, just really leaned into who she was.

She's obviously a great athlete. I mean, she can pitch the ball. It's unreal. I never liked going up against her in batting or during our little scrimmages. But you're going to be seeing a lot more of her in the next three years. I expect her to be doing really, really big things. We'll be rooting behind her, for sure.

**Q. Skylar, you've quickly made your mark on this program. What has it been like to be a Gator?**

SKYLAR WALLACE: That's a tough question to answer right now (tearing up).

I don't really have words to put that into. Coach Walton not only recruited me one time, but twice. To have that opportunity and come to the University of Florida and not only develop as an athlete but more as a person, and him just trusting in me, giving me every opportunity. I mean, the resources, the programs, the classes, the teachers, everything at University of Florida really just gives you countless opportunities to be the person that you want to be.

Then with obviously athletics, I mean, the time, the dedication the whole staff puts into us, is unreal. It's unmatched, honestly. You don't get what you get here anywhere else. Super grateful that I got to wear this uniform.

I can't really put much words into it, but... Being a Gator is the best thing I ever did. I stand on that. It is the greatest program in college softball and the greatest university in America.

**Q. Kendra, can you speak to your teammate, what she's meant to you?**

KENDRA FALBY: I mean, not many people get to say that they play with the person who leads the DI softball in runs scored.

I mean, it's been an amazing -- that's all I know. I only know Skylar. Now she's leaving me. I didn't think that was allowed. You've got another year, right?

That's all I've known. I've known her since I walked in as a freshman. She's right in your face, here we go. That's all I know. I only know a competitor on and off the field, that's who she is, she competes.

Seeing her get after it on the field day in and day out has been nothing short of amazing. I don't know. Going after it in BP, just watching her hit ball after ball over the fence. Dang, can I do that? She makes it look so effortless.

Seeing her grow as a leader from the beginning to the end, just how she's been able to lead this team. We had a sour taste in our mouth last year. How she was able to walk out her senior year and make sure she took this team under her wing, led the way she did.

She's done amazing things for this program, this sport. So many little girls look up to her. I'm so happy that I was just a small part of her journey. It means the world to me to have been able to play with her because Skylar Wallace is a name the NCAA is going to know forever. It's never going away. I'm just glad I was able to be a small part of that.

**Q. For you being the only two players coming back from last season, how special was it this season to be able to put together this season, first semifinals for the team in seven years?**

SKYLAR WALLACE: I mean, super special. This team has been a very, very special team. The way we put things aside, the way we get after it, the way we work.

If you would have asked me in August, September, if we would have been here, I probably would have told you no.

But it's been one helluva ride. It's special. It's tears of sadness because it sucks I don't get to put this uniform on again. I'm so grateful I had the opportunity to play with this team one more year. This team has just allowed me to be better as a woman and as an athlete. I'm forever in debt to this team specifically and the University of Florida, so...

KENDRA FALBY: Yeah, I mean, you don't see a team that has to add 11 new players on the team. So everyone is probably looking at us, What's heck is going on at Florida? Now we're sitting here. So something really good.

I mean, I would hate to be in Skylar's shoes right now obviously. I get to come back another year. But it's really just this team has been so, so special. The fact that I get to do it again, I'm so grateful.

There's nowhere else you'd want to end your college season. Even though it's a bitter taste in our mouth

because of how close the game was, all we can see is we were fearless this weekend, put our hearts on the line. We came up there and fought. That's all you can ask of us.

I mean, I don't even have any words. People didn't think we would be here. We were supposed to be seventh in the SEC. We won the SEC tournament, we came here, and we almost did it, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, players. We'll continue with questions for coach.

SKYLAR WALLACE: Go Gators.

KENDRA FALBY: Yeah, go Gators.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Walton.

**Q. Keagan, how do you put into words the performance?**

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I think I'd be remiss not to say how the heck can someone follow up with what these guys just said? I mean, gosh, dang, I'm the luckiest person alive to have players that embody professionalism. I'm just amazed at the words that come out of their mouth. Not only their words, but their actions. Just amazing to me.

Keagan was great. She pitched really well. Obviously not well enough for us to win that game. She pitched really well. Had a really good season. We just didn't have enough. Again, it is what it is.

I'm proud. I'm proud of her, proud of Ava, the other two, Mackenzie and Olivia for giving us everything they had every single day.

**Q. Jayda, in their leadoff spot, you did a pretty good job of keeping her in check. The top to bottom nature of their offense...**

TIM WALTON: It's very similar to our offense. I think they're very similar. Yeah, I don't know how many times, might have been the ninth time she faced Keagan, more than likely probably would have been a pitching change, given most years, the number of times.

Yeah, I mean, it is what it is. It is what it is.

**Q. On the topic of all the newcomers, so many freshmen, how big have they been?**

TIM WALTON: Yeah, with the seven freshmen, I think you saw a lot of growth, just the ability. Four of them live together, the other three live together. Sorry, three and

three live together. Olivia had volleyball kids as roommates.

Cassidy McLellan got hurt at Mississippi State this season. She was starting to come into her own as well.

The seven freshmen did good. They were really close. I think three or four of them played together in travel ball or some other things.

The one thing, like I said before, our strength coach said, Man, this freshman class has it. They do a good job working. They do things when you're not paying attention. They put the extra time in. Proud of them.

With the other four, brought in Jocelyn and Korbe and Brooke Barnard. Mackenzie was a grad transfer.

Long of short, really proud of the seven returners that really were the glue to kind of bring them all together, teach 'em. We had some mistakes along the way, but really teach 'em what our program is, kind of what it embodies.

It's more about the people than it is about softball. They're all good at softball. Everybody we brought in, they're good at softball. That's the easy part. It's figuring out how to get them to share, communicate, do all the other stuff that's pretty difficult.

They did a really good job of just buying in.

**Q. Obviously you played these two excellent games, made-for-TV drama, as you mentioned. Next year these two teams become conference mates. Is this an opportunity for you to show how you're right there with them? What does it look like?**

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I mean, we've got some things to get better at. We have to replace someone like Skylar Wallace, Katie Kistler, Avery Goelz, Emily Wilkie. I say those. Baylee Goddard. Those were our leaders, the persons that were helping. They're very helpful. By helpful, it doesn't necessarily mean you tell somebody what to do, you just teach 'em how to do it. Baylee Goddard is probably one of the best.

Really proud of those seniors. Mackenzie was a grad transfer, fit right in.

I think the biggest thing for us, we got better athletically. Next year we're pretty athletic. We have some kids coming in, they're pretty fast, can do some things.

Obviously, I said it from the beginning of the season, we have a really good team. We tried to add a player last

summer to really complement the young pitchers. We didn't really do that. But with what we had, finishing here third place, whatever, third place is third place.

I think just the fact that we competed all the way through the SEC, SEC tournament, regional, super regional. And even here. This is the most innings we played not playing for a national championship at the College World Series.

I'm proud of that. I hate losing. It's the worst. But I'm proud of my team for the fight and the competitiveness they showed. I don't think we've ever in our program's history won the first game, lost the second game, found a way to keep winning. It's really hard to do emotionally.

We probably are a little bit out of gas, to be honest with you. It's just a lot. We're here for eight or nine days. Five rain delays, whatever else it was, it's a lot.

I'm proud. None of my players made any excuses or blamed anybody. They went out there and had fun.

**Q. Playing Oklahoma these past two days, a veteran team, if you had to point to a few aspects of your game plan that started clicking and worked, what would they be?**

TIM WALTON: I like the seven home runs. I think that was nice (smiling). Good coaching there.

Yeah, I mean, there's so many little things. I thought we did a good job. We had the intentional walk there in the seventh inning to set up the forced double play. What are they doing? That run doesn't matter. We're trying to make it a little easier athletically with some of their personnel has some good athletes in the seven and nine hole that can run and do some things.

I thought the game plan was good. I mean, we really saw pretty much everybody except for Keeney. I thought the game plan was good. We had a good go on Kelly Maxwell. If you listen to my clips on my radio pregame, I said, You better get Kelly Maxwell early. If you don't get her early, you're not getting her late. That's how she is.

Whether that's her DNA, the pitching coach, whatever it is, she's been like that her whole career. When she gets settled, she can get tough. When she's unsettled, she can give up some runs.

I thought we did a good job. We just needed couple more. You could feel it. I was running a couple times trying to make something happen. We needed one more run at least. I didn't feel comfortable. AK got her second sacrifice bunt I think of the season down.

I thought the game plan was good. We just needed one more little something. I don't know what it was. It could be an amazing knuckle ball change-up or something just to get them off balance. Keagan threw 260 pitches probably, right? That's a lot. Just didn't quite have a lot.

**Q. What is it about this Oklahoma team that makes it so tough, they just keep coming?**

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I mean, I recruited quite a few of 'em. You build relationships with them in the recruiting process. There's a bunch of 'em.

Again, I think when you look at what Coach Gasso recruits like, she likes athletes. She doesn't like to be just one-dimensional. She really wants to bunt and kind of run in your face. If you watch her style, she likes to fake bunt, steal, do some squeeze stuff. She likes a lot of that. Who doesn't like the home run?

Getting down to it in a championship series, you're going to have to be able to bunt, steal, run, play defense. She taught me a ton about defense when I coached with her, just her ability to pay attention to little things. I think the athletes that she recruits, they embody that. They're good athletes. They're not just one-dimensional. They do a lot of things athletically. Their softball IQ is really high.

That's one things that stands out to me the most. Most of the Oklahoma Sooners team versus a high IQ or they came with that or she's helped instill that.

I think I heard today, 17 College World Series appearances. She's been there since 1995. Long of short, they've done a really good job of bringing athletes in that can compete at the highest levels.

You have to be able to do the fundamental things, the routine things. They always do. It wasn't an easy play that Alyssa Brito made on Katie Kistler in the seventh, whatever it was, to lead off. I think she was getting called off by Jennings. I even told the umpire, I think she's out. I have two challenges. Let's see here. Might as well.

Give credit to the umpires. They never get any credit. In the collision at second base, an odd thing that happened. They went to check that on their own. I think that was just give them credit. They're just trying to get it right. I applauded them for that. Whether it was against me or for me, I didn't even really care. I thought them being able to make sure they got the stuff right. That was kind of a cool video replay moment that we haven't had an opportunity to share on this stage very much.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

TIM WALTON: Go Gators. Appreciate you.

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