

# 2016 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



## Patty Gasso Shay Knighten Paige Parker Oklahoma

Oklahoma - 3, Alabama - 0

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Coach, let's get some general comments about the game from you.

PATTY GASSO: Wow, it's just a tough, tough game, a tough way to get started in the College World Series, two teams that are very good and fighting against each other. (Alexis) Osorio is a phenomenal pitcher. We all know that. We've been working very hard to prepare for her, and we still struck out 10 times. But I think what our team knows is that you've just got to fight through these counts, and good things can happen. I thought Paige (Parker) was phenomenal, got out of some big innings, which were big for us. I liked how Kelsey Arnold found her way on. Erin Miller hit the ball hard, which opened up an opportunity with an error to get us in scoring position, which started to feel like we were going to get a little bit of confidence from that, and then CC (Caleigh Clifton) finding her way on and then Shay (Knighten) delivering the big blow was -- it's pretty special for a freshman to do that at the College World Series, but I never even call her a freshman because of her style of swing. It's powerful. It can be a game changer. It did before when we've played Alabama.

Really proud of this team, the way they came out with their approach. They never got down. They just fought until the end, and that's what it's about when you're here. You've just got to leave everything you have on the field whenever you're out there.

### **Q. Shay, walk us through the at-bat and the home run at the end.**

SHAY KNIGHTEN: I was just going up there trying to do it for my team, sticking to my game plan, just trying to hit something hard. I knew if I could get the ball on the ground, I just wanted to move my runner, so just going up there, trying to be aggressive but smart, and I guess it paid off.

### **Q. Shay, you described the first home run that you**

**hit against Alabama as this amazing moment where you were able to lift up your team. How would you describe this one, and was that weighing on your mind when you got up there to the plate?**

SHAY KNIGHTEN: I didn't even remember that game. That was the farthest thing from my mind. It was just be in the moment, do it for my team. My mindset was just hit the ball hard. I didn't try to do too much, just tried to do it for my team, like I said. There's no other way to explain it.

### **Q. Paige, how many times have you hugged Shay since the end of the game? And second, talk about just the pressure of going against Alabama's offense but also knowing that Osorio is so dominant this postseason, just the pressure of that.**

PAIGE PARKER: Well, I can't count how many times I've hugged Shay. What she did was absolutely incredible, and what a way to make your Women's College World Series appearance. To come in as a freshman and do this is just amazing. I'm so proud of her.

For the second question, you know, I really wasn't thinking about the pressure. I was just trying to stay in the moment. Alabama is a very, very good team, and I knew it was going to be a really tough-fought battle. Alexis Osorio is a phenomenal pitcher and I knew it was going to be a dogfight. I was just thinking about helping my team stay in the game. That was the only thing I was thinking about the whole time.

### **Q. Shay, it seemed like you guys were getting better at-bats as the game went on. Did you feel that was the case, and how much did that help you at the end to get a good swing there?**

SHAY KNIGHTEN: I think we were just trying to stick to our game plan, not trying to do too much, not trying to be the big hero because we knew Alabama has bats. We knew that they're going to come out swinging, too. So I just think as the game went on, we just kind of got together and were like, we're going to do this for each other, just kind of pass the torch, stick to the game plan and do anything we have to do to get this win.

### **Q. Paige, can you talk about just the mindset of throwing two innings last night and then having to come back, sleep, think all day, come back and**

**throw? There were also some times you had runners in scoring position.**

PAIGE PARKER: I wasn't thinking too much about playing two innings last night and then continuing on today. I was just sticking with the game plan and not changing my mindset at all, and you know, they had some situations where they had some runners on, and I was just determined to not let them score, to keep my team in the game and just fight.

**Q. Patty, first of all, what did you think on the play where Haylie McCleney got the ball at the wall, and what is it about Shay's swing that seems to match Osorio so far?**

PATTY GASSO: As soon as the ball went to center field, I went, ugh, anywhere but center field because she can probably jump over the fence and still make a play in the stands. That's how athletic she is. I wasn't surprised, just kind of wishing it to go over a little bit higher, further. Shay is just a good hitter that can cover the zone pretty well, so I think a lot of it was a pitch that was up, and with a rise ball pitcher, you're going to -- I think this one knows, as well, sometimes when it's up there, it may not be the greatest looking swing, but with power and determination a ball can get out that way.

I think it was a tough pitch. It was up in the zone and probably out of the zone, but Shay just had a mindset of finding a way to get something hit hard. I mean, it's hard to get in scoring position off of her, and when you get somebody at second, I think that we felt like this is -- we can't waste these opportunities anymore. I think Shay is just -- it was just her will to get it done.

**Q. Patty, you said yesterday that you felt like the games at Alabama last year were really seminal for Paige to become the pitcher she is now. Were there moments tonight that you felt like were products of just that evolution she's had in the last year?**

PATTY GASSO: Absolutely I would say yes to that. She was in very similar situations for anybody who was watching last year. It looked a lot like what you just saw. I think Paige would come off a little shaky physically, like her body would be a little nervous, her eyes would be -- she was in a tough setting. I think she's definitely matured into a veteran as a sophomore, and like I said, sometimes you've got to go through some tough times to get the end product. It was hard to let that go and not get to the World Series, but what it did for our team, especially Paige, is the reason why we're continuing on as we are.

**Q. Coach, I wanted to ask, when you get to this point and it's towards the end, the seventh, eighth inning, as good as Osorio was pitching, how much of it was keep trying to make her pitch instead of**

**swinging at stuff and trying to make a play?**

PATTY GASSO: I can't even tell you how hard it is to hit off of her, and so you can watch it on TV or even -- and go, why are you swinging at that? That is ridiculous. Why would you swing at something out of the zone? I think it was Syd Romero in the first inning that swung at something that high, but it's hard to see what a ball is doing. They will tell you that. You can look at it on video and you can think that it's easy. It is not, thus her strikeouts against some very good hitting teams. You've got to go in knowing that you're going to strike out 10-plus times and not let that bother you. You just have to wait until it's the right time.

We tried to stay aggressive because if you stand there and you watch, she'll get you, and she kept working early counts, like we were down 1-2, 0-2, 2-2s, as the game went on you could see us starting to feel a little more comfortable, so the more we can see her throw the better we can start to make our judgments, and I thought middle, late part of the game you could see us start to make those adjustments and see the ball a little bit better, but it's difficult. She is that good. She is that good.

**Q. When you missed the first-and-third situation with one out and you didn't get a run that inning, your team huddled and things like that. Then they came back the next at-bats and continued to battle. Talk about that moment, though, and what you said to your team at that point.**

PATTY GASSO: Quite honestly, I take a lot of that on myself. I didn't like how I didn't take a more aggressive approach from a coach's standpoint, and so I was just kind of rattling them to pick me up, I guess.

We've been in these situations where we haven't gotten things done, but that's why we play seven innings. That's why we stay in the game. I mean, what's important here at the World Series is that you leave everything on the field, every game you play, that you have nothing left mentally, physically, emotionally. It's all on the field. That's all you can do. That's what this team was doing, through the highs, through the lows. That's what we were trying to do.

**Q. Patty, though Shay hits the home run and the error they committed ends up not mattering, I still wonder can you comment on just how much every play does matter, because it could have been a 1-0 game and getting that base could have been all that matters, and you guys had to respond and make plays, just everything seemed so heightened.**

PATTY GASSO: Uh-huh. It didn't matter but it did matter because it created momentum into our dugout, so we got a runner on second, when it's Kelsey Arnold in your mind, you're thinking, we're going to score,

we're going to score, because she's our runner, and she knows it, she knew it, we talked about it, so I intentionally called a timeout to get our group together to talk about how big she's going to jump on this, work a ball up the middle, anywhere they put it we're going to try to score because they have to throw to home plate. If they cut it, that doesn't make sense. Throw it to home plate. If you throw us out we're going to get another runner in scoring position, but we had to try to score. That was the whole idea. Wherever you hit it, if it goes through, we're going. Even if it goes to center field, we're going to try to go.

So it was that -- that error really created -- this game is all about momentum. It's momentum, and even though it didn't matter, it did matter. I think it created a lot of momentum for our dugout, as well.

**Q. Paige, Patty was talking about before the 2015 Super Regional at Tuscaloosa. What did you take away from that?**

PAIGE PARKER: You know, it was a big learning experience for me. It was a tough environment to go into and to play in, and just taking -- even though it wasn't the outcome that we wanted, just taking a lot of lessons from that, from those games, and just using them to get better this year and to just kind of -- thinking about that wasn't going to define me, and I was going to break through from that and just learn a lot of lessons and just go on and push forward from that.