

2016 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Patty Gasso
Caleigh Clifton
Shay Knighten
Paige Parker
Oklahoma

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with an opening statement from coach.

PATTY GASSO: Intense, stressful, hard working. It was probably one of the hardest fought wins we have had just because of the intensity and knowing what we're facing with a team like LSU.

I shout out to my coaching staff, Melyssa Lombardi was exceptional tonight. As well as JT (Gasso). Really getting these guys prepared for what we were about to face.

The plan was, if we're doing what we do right, we're going to see a multiple amount of pitchers and that was the goal. Let's see how many pitchers they're going to throw out there against us. And we saw all three. That was kind of a victory for us. It's what we were looking for.

So, defense, impeccable. Game-ending double play. I don't even know that we even understand what is happening tomorrow, because we're just playing, and we're playing hard, and they don't stop, they never stop.

I thought Paige just was a warrior tonight. And the idea of us getting a chance to play for a national championship is pretty surreal right now.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please?

Q. Talk about at the third inning when it was tied, Paige on the mound, you bring them into a circle. What do you talk to them to keep them focused and just finish out?

PATTY GASSO: I think just reminding them and talking with Paige, let your defense work for you. One big hit isn't going to be enough. Just get ourselves back in and allow your team to score for you, and we do.

We do a good job when someone scores, we -- more times than not, will score right back and even the number or better the number. So that's something that's been going on all season. So it's just a reminder. That was really it.

Q. Paige, your team did come back, like coach said, and got you runs. You put up zeros the rest of the night. That helped settle you down or give you more conviction to come back and shut them out the rest of the way?

PAIGE PARKER: Most definitely. Our team does a great job of answering back and that gave me a lot of confidence knowing that they were going to score a lot of runs. So, just going out after that third inning and just making some adjustments and going up from there.

Q. Caleigh, against Alabama in the 8th inning you're down 0-2 in the count, and you come back and get a walk. This game in the third, you're down 0-2, and you get a full count, and you end up an error at second base. Can you talk about what makes you so good in those situations? And do you have any motivation because you got Shay behind you?

CALEIGH CLIFTON: Definitely. I just try to find my way on base, because I know what I have behind me. And I know that just getting on base and passing the torch this offense is going to do something for us. So me getting on base is going to help us, whether it's walk or hit by pitch or just whatever it is, because I know Shay's going to back me up. She's got my back.

Q. What have you seen from Auburn this week and what's your impression? And is there conference pride involved here, your 2-0 this week against the SEC.

PATTY GASSO: I go way back with Coach (Clint) Myers. We coached -- I coached at Long Beach City College and he was at Central Arizona, so I've known him and the fantastic job that's done for a long time. So I look forward to it.

Auburn is very well coached, very well balanced. We watched some, but I think most of our concentration was what was right in front of us versus what we hope will be ahead. So we go back to the drawing board tomorrow and do what we have been doing and do a

good job of preparation.

PAIGE PARKER: They are very well coached team, and we know it's going to be a battle, and we're just excited to get out there and have a chance to play for a national championship.

SHAY KNIGHTEN: We're going to go out and fight like we always have been. It's another game. We're just going to go out, have each other's backs and just fight until the end, no matter what happens.

CALEIGH CLIFTON: : Same. Just going out there and fighting, give it all we got, go pitch by pitch, inning by inning and giving it our all.

Q. Shay, as a southern California kid, I think that you might remember playing with, or against, Auburn's (Kaylee) Carlson and (Carlee) Wallace. If you do, what do you remember about that and what's it going to be like facing off with those girls?

SHAY KNIGHTEN: They're tough competitors. They fight. They're hard fought kids. I think it's going to be a fun game just seeing familiar faces. It's not that it's like a huge game, it's just playing one game at a time. Not trying to over think things and not looking at the players that I know as, like, as an oh my gosh moment. Just playing like it's any other team.

Q. Shay, talk about where you were in your mindset just before you knocked that one out.

SHAY KNIGHTEN: In my mind I was just thinking battle. I had two strikes, I was just thinking find your way on base. A walk, a hit by pitch, a little dinker, something. Just hit the ball hard, put the ball in play. And that paid off.

Q. Caleigh and Shay, at the beginning of the season you guys coming in as freshmen, did you envision playing for a national championship this year? And what's it going to be like to be on that stage playing for a national championship?

CALEIGH CLIFTON: : We had hoped for that, like that's something we have always wanted. But it's kind of unbelievable that we are, especially as freshmen. Everyone sees us as underdogs. And since we were freshmen no one thought we would be here. Especially with the team we were last year. But it's kind of crazy. But it works out for us.

SHAY KNIGHTEN: It's one of the things that I think all of us have been dreaming about since we were little. For it to be for like our freshman year, it's just unreal. I don't think it will really become real until I set foot on that field.

It's more of just taking it one game at a time, not trying

to over think things, not look at the bigger picture. Just stay with my team.

Q. 30-game win streak, three WCWS finals in six years. Where will this rank as far as your accomplishments at OU?

PATTY GASSO: Quite honestly, I don't know. I don't think about my accomplishments, because they're not mine, they're ours. Every team that's been there has been so different.

So this is just a different, a hard working, competitive, young group that is afraid of nothing. So, it's just what I want to do in this program, to represent OU, just like these guys, we want to represent OU. We want to represent the state. There's a lot of pride in this.

But that's who we are and that's what our expectations are every year. So, to be here is, it's something special, but it's something that we expect from this program.

Q. Over the last couple days you've gotten into some jams here and there against Alabama and Michigan. And some rough spots. Then the same thing happened today. Can you talk to your mindset in those situations and just what you've been doing to consistently get yourself out of those.

PAIGE PARKER: Be tough and battle. I know my defense is behind me, and I know that they're going to make plays. And it's just all about just going out there and fighting and working as hard as I can to keep them off the bases and from scoring. So it's just letting my defense work behind me, because I know that they're fantastic, and they have my back.

Q. What told you that all these pieces, new and old, could fit together in a way that would lead here?

PATTY GASSO: Another answer I don't know.

(Laughter.)

I think it took us a little bit of time to figure out the lineup. If you look at what our lineup looked like at the beginning of the season, it's completely different than it was from then to now. Different people in different positions.

But we just -- the chemistry on this team is something that I have not seen in a long time. This group is so enjoyable to be around every day. At practice, on the field, in battle, it's just a joy to be around them. They truly appreciate and respect each other and at practice every day I don't have to bark at them because they work.

So, it's just all the pay off. I didn't know how it would -- I mean, if you asked me this in February when we had lost four games in the first two weekends, or three weekends, I wouldn't expect this, but perseverance got us here.

Q. You talked all season long about your freshmen because they have been so spectacular for you. But I think now they have got in the post-season six home runs combined, plus what they're doing defensively. At what point, as a coach, do you just kind of sit back and look at them in amazement at what they have been able to accomplish? And how much have you seen them just since the regionals, started kind of improve or change and maybe taking some leadership in this team?

PATTY GASSO: You know, I don't know that I necessarily really refer to them as freshmen because of their maturity and approach at the plate, on the field.

One thing that I do know about this group is they love challenges, and they love competition. So, with that, you've already kind of gotten so far just with that approach. But I think what this group and these freshmen and this team love, we earned this. Our road was tough. We started with Alabama, it was a big rival. Then on to Michigan, top-ranked team here at this tournament. LSU was the best ERA in the country.

So, we did it right, but this group and these freshmen wanted it that way. They wanted that challenge. They embrace it, and they love it. So, I don't know what else to say. They just, they love the stuff.

Q. About the crowd and how much that has helped you guys this week. Being so close to, obviously, Norman and everything and what kind of an advantage that's going to be now that you're in the championship series.

PATTY GASSO: Well, I trust that the Sooner Nation will come out to help us through this, because it's not going to be easy.

But the crowd and the fans and the families have been just on cloud nine with us. We're just having a lot of fun with these guys, and they're so prideful, and I think that's what I love about this is the pride that goes into following this team. And the love and the emotion and seeing their parents crying and seeing all of this is just, sometimes you don't understand what you're doing, how much it affects people. Whether we're wearing

bracelets for people, and they get so much joy out of what we do. I think this team does it the right way. So, if we can do that, that's part of the joy is bringing joy to others who watch us.

Q. Just fresh off a few hours after getting eliminated, Michigan's Sierra Romero is up in the stands wearing an OU shirt and obviously pulling for her sister. That was a pretty special thing. What were your thoughts on that and kind of the family kind of thing they have going on?

PATTY GASSO: You know, it was a tough game yesterday. It was. It was tough for -- to watch Michigan have to go into the morning game, or noon game. But by the time we got out of here, I mean I felt for them. I talked to Sydney (Romero) a little bit and just said, we got, we have got your sister. We will continue to represent your family here.

So it was just -- I don't know if that meant anything to her, but I know her sister is such a big part of her life and anybody that's a big part of Sydney's life is a part of ours. And that's what we wanted to do is just try to -- if she couldn't feel this joy, we're going to try to help Sydney feel this joy with her.

So, it's a tough deal, but we respect Michigan, and I don't think Sydney would be the player she is today without Sierra.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.