

2016 Women's College World Series

Monday, June 6, 2016
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Patty Gasso
Shay Knighten
Paige Parker
Sydney Romero
Oklahoma

Oklahoma - 3, Auburn - 2

THE MODERATOR: Good evening. At this time we have Oklahoma on the dais. Coach, we'll start with general comments about the game.

PATTY GASSO: Another tough battle, and we are just really riding on adrenaline right now. I think our team came out ready to play. I liked what Paige did. She was pretty efficient. I can normally ask her -- how many pitches did you throw?

PAIGE PARKER: 92.

PATTY GASSO: It was 91. It's freaky how she can do that, but she can do it. I thought it was pretty efficient and effective, and I thought our defense, especially at the end of the game, the way Shay stepped up for Paige, the way Syd stepped up for Paige, I thought we hit the ball hard throughout the night, but the big one by Syd to help her pitcher stay out there and get it done was special. Really proud of the effort tonight.

Q. Sydney, can you take us through the home run in the third inning, what pitch you were looking for and what pitch you got?

SYDNEY ROMERO: I just had my game plan. I was talking with my hitting coach before, and we had a game plan and I stuck with it and executed.

Q. Patty, can you describe what's going through your head as you watch Sydney round third? You looked like you were shaking your head a little bit on the home run.

PATTY GASSO: Every time she comes around, I just say, Sydney Romero. I don't know why, except just it's Sydney Romero. I really don't even have any idea what I was doing, I just know I said, Sydney Romero. She executed a nice plan, sat back on that and hit it hard to give us a little bit of confidence.

Q. Patty and Shay, we have watched you guys score a lot of points, you can run, but you've talked about this defense all year, so again, it comes up huge in this game, and then Shay, when she answers, if you could follow with talk about the defensive play tonight and the big play in the game.

PATTY GASSO: We were in a tough position right there, and we knew their style. We know that if there's an angle down, a ball hit on the ground, the runner at third will break, and you could see that they were trying to do that with every leadoff and every pitch that was taken. They were jumping real hard, almost to a point where Lea (Wodach) was wanting to pick that way. But that's part of their game plan so we knew anything that was going to be hit hard and then knowing them and how they're coached, their execution would be to the right side of the field, which is where it should be. Shay, that was just a testimony to her love for her team and the will to make a play, took it off the chin, gathered it up, Wodach sticking at home plate. It was tremendous, and those are plays you need to win championships and national championships.

I think earlier in the game, CC (Caleigh Clifton) made a really nice play in the three-four hole to throw the runner out at first. We felt like we kept taking momentum away, but the end of the game was something that I will treasure because these guys have to deal with me every day on defense, and I keep telling them, defense wins championships, but they don't believe me sometimes.

Q. Shay, do you believe her?

SHAY KNIGHTEN: Oh, I definitely believe her. For me it was doing it for Paige, doing whatever it took for my team. I don't know why, but I had a feeling that the ball was going to be hit to the right side and I knew how they swing it was going to be hit hard, so I just knew if I keep my body in front of it, knock it down, I'll have a play somewhere, and like Coach said, I just took it off the chin, and I saw her running so I just tried to get it as quick as I could but make an accurate throw to Lea, and she stuck it.

Q. Similar situation late against Michigan and found a way through. What is it about this young team that allows them to keep coming through in these situations?

PATTY GASSO: I wish I could bottle it up and keep it because it's pretty incredible, but it's just their spirit of competition and refusing to lose, not wanting to get beat, finding ways to make plays, finding things -- finding ways to make things happen in their favor. They are a very tight-knit group and they are OK -- when the ball got hit over the fence, no one panicked, and the attitude was we've got you. You could see them kind of raise each other up that way, and it's special to watch. It's a really special dynamic that I haven't seen in a team I don't think ever, and it's really special. It's something that I'll always remember as the style that this team has. It's very fun to watch.

Q. Paige, what does it mean to you to have your defense making plays like that, and what are you thinking when that ball is hit at her and she's throwing it to home at that?

PAIGE PARKER: It means the world to me. I know how hard our defense works every day at practice, and for them to come up big like that, it's just something really special, and when Shay made that play -- when that ball was hit, I knew Shay was going to make that make that play because I see her make that play all the time. I just have the utmost confidence in our defense, and they came up really big tonight.

Q. Paige, was there any part of you that wished you would have let Sydney get that ball that you overthrew to first base and how did you regather yourself after that?

PAIGE PARKER: I think I just rushed it a little bit. I just went after the ball. I didn't really think about Syd in that situation. I just kind of reacted, and I think I just rushed it a little bit, and I just had to compose myself afterward and go on from there. Just not let it affect me at all.

Q. Sydney, do you remember the exact pitch and what it was in that home run, like a changeup fastball, and then for Paige, what does that do for momentum getting that early lead?

SYDNEY ROMERO: What were you asking?

Q. Do you remember the exact pitch on that home run?

SYDNEY ROMERO: Yes.

Q. What kind of pitch was it?

SYDNEY ROMERO: It was a changeup.

Q. Paige, what does that do for your momentum?

PAIGE PARKER: I think it was a really big momentum shift. Us getting two runners on and Sydney coming up, I knew she was going to do something big in that situation, and it was definitely a momentum shift for us, and it gave me a lot of confidence on the mound.

Q. Sydney, with your sister's experience I assume you've been to the World Series before. You've played in it this year. You obviously know the memories and all the things that come out of this. For you to have such a huge hit in this game, what does that mean for you knowing what this series means, and Patty, is there anything -- you talked earlier in the week about sort of Romero genes. Is there anything about that that has sort of allowed her to have that kind of play in this series?

PATTY GASSO: Well, we've talked about -- like you said, we talked about it before. Sierra is Syd's hero and has taught her how to play the game, or played along with her, and Syd in the early part of the year was always Sierra's little sister Syd, and we needed to establish Sydney Romero, thus every time she rounds third, I say Sydney Romero, because I want Sydney Romero to be Sydney Romero, in honor of her sister Sierra who taught her how to swing the bat probably and her dad and her family. They're a very tight-knit family and so she's doing it for her family, for her sister but this is Syd Romero who's doing it, and it's been pretty cool to see her really kind of gravitate and understand that.

Q. Syd, from your perspective?

SYDNEY ROMERO: I mean, being here at the World Series in the previous years, I felt like I've been living in my sister's experience because all I've wanted to do is be on that field, and the fact that we're here and stepping up in that game, it felt really good.

Q. Paige, through six innings you had allowed two or three hits, no runs, you had struck out nobody. I'm just wondering what kind of a game were you having. Were you particularly crafty tonight to make that happen?

PAIGE PARKER: I don't think so. I was just trying to go out there and execute the game plan to the best of my ability, and like I said, just trust my defense, and they came up big.

Q. Did you know you hadn't struck anyone out at that point?

PAIGE PARKER: Yeah, I did. (Laughter).

Q. Coach, I was just wondering if Auburn's starting Lexi Davis, a pitcher who hasn't pitched this postseason, if that caught you by surprise and how you think she performed in that situation?

PATTY GASSO: I think she did well. I know she's a senior, so in some respect, I wasn't necessarily so surprised, but we didn't know, and we were ready. We talked and looked at -- we did. We had to look at all of them and just be prepared for it. So it wasn't really a major detail but more of understanding what they brought and what we needed to do.

I thought we hit the ball pretty hard tonight. They made some good plays. It was just talking about it and knowing what we needed to do.

Q. Patty, what have you seen from the work JT (Gasso) has done with Sydney, and for all we talk about family with this team, what is it like watching that for you?

PATTY GASSO: Is he here?

THE MODERATOR: He's in the back.

PATTY GASSO: Oh. Proudful. I've got to stop. Proudful.

Q. Patty, I just want to ask about Shay Knighten starting in the outfield to start the season and Lea Wodach starting in the outfield to start the season, and Shay obviously has an arm so she threw her out at home, but what's it like to see those two change so much to kind of take that next step?

PATTY GASSO: When we did that, our world changed. We lost Whitney Montgomery, who was one of the best catchers in the country, and one of our mottos and something we always say, and it's no disrespect to anybody, but there's no one player bigger than our team. So with that Lea Wodach said, "It's me, I've got you guys." So we moved her back to the plate, behind the plate. Her offense suffered a little bit, but we picked her up that way. Kady Self was playing first base. CC wasn't even in the lineup I don't think, or her and Shay were kind of moving in and out, so moving Kady back to left field where she feels most comfortable, and Shay was having a little bit of injury problems, so kept CC at second, who's got phenomenal range, and Shay Knighten is an excellent first baseman, as you saw tonight. She's tough. That changed our world. When we made those changes, everything really seemed to click very well, and it changed our world.

Q. Patty, three years ago you brought back not Keilani Ricketts to pitch in Game 2 of the national championship you won. Any chance you have a fresh Paige Parker?

PATTY GASSO: I don't know. I don't know yet. I don't know. We've got to go back and talk. Our pitching staff is just waiting. They're sitting in waiting and saying whenever you need us, we're ready. They're just waiting. It's all about tomorrow and what we feel like after a good night's rest and so forth, so we haven't even gotten that far yet.

Q. Interesting that you mentioned that Paige threw 91 pitches, not all that many relatively. How important is that as you go forward?

PATTY GASSO: Very important, but also at the same time when you get into this game, you can't feel -- you

cannot feel anything. You cannot feel pain. You cannot feel tired. You cannot feel sore. You can't. You've got to live off of adrenaline. That's what wins championships. So there are no excuses, anyone, no one. They're going to find a way. I mean, a lot of these guys are banged up, but you don't know it because they will not take themselves out of this game. So it is everything -- you're dreaming of this day, and every one of these guys are going to beg to be on that field. I know that. And they're going to beg to get in the game somehow to help this team win a championship.

Q. Paige, what have you been doing to try to stay as fresh as possible? Is it the same routine, or have you added some things to try to keep your body fresh?

PAIGE PARKER: I have a pretty good routine with our trainer, and it's just making sure I ice afterward and just doing whatever I have to do to feel fresh for the next day.