

2017 Women's College World Series

Tuesday, June 6, 2017
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Patty Gasso
Paige Lowary
Paige Parker
Fale Aviu
Shay Knighten
Nicole Mendes
Oklahoma

Oklahoma - 7, Florida - 5

PATTY GASSO: Epic, epic battle. I don't know what else -- that was it. This is one of the greatest games I think in College World Series history, I would guess. It was like two heavyweight fighters throwing punch after punch. Florida just kept answering everything that we put out there, and we tried to answer back, and it was a game of will, a game of team, a game of character. We were running out of gas a little bit, but they just kept fighting. I could not tell you -- I will never forget the pitching duo here and how they tag-teamed. It was an emotional, emotional roller coaster of a game and one that I will never, ever, ever, ever forget.

Q. Patty, as that game continued, can you give us an idea what you were telling your team through that, especially if you would throw a hey maker and they would counter punch?

PATTY GASSO: I think all of us coaches were just like, 'hang in there, keep fighting, keep fighting,' and that's been what got us here. And almost -- although our backs aren't against the wall for our season to be over, it started to feel like that, like we just -- just survive, survive, survive, just keep surviving. It was crazy. They just kept going, both teams. Both teams, not just ours. Both teams just kept going, kept playing hard.

Q. Patty, the fact that this game went 17 but the quality of this game, I mean, there wasn't -- that sort of thing wasn't out there. How do you put that into context with all the softball at that you've seen over the years and the stakes on the field tonight and the manner with which these two teams played?

PATTY GASSO: Like I said, I think it was just an epic battle, two teams that know the importance of winning this first game and putting everything out there. That's it in a nutshell. No one wanted to walk off that field losing, and that's what it felt like for 17 innings. It never stopped.

Q. Paige Lowary, you guys talked about being little girls and dreaming of being in this situation. What did that feel like for you with the crowd on their feet cheering you on?

PAIGE LOWARY: As crazy as it sounds, I try to keep the same mindset every time I go out on the field because if I make it too big, it just gets out of control, so I just tried to focus on the pitch that I was throwing.

Q. Shay and Nicole, twice in extra innings you guys took the lead and twice they came back. How were you guys able to stay poised after they came back and tied up with you guys?

SHAY KNIGHTEN: I think we just kind of stuck together. We knew that they were going to punch, and it was up to us to kind of punch back and want to fight back and not want to back down. And an extra innings game like that is crazy, and in the World Series it's even crazier and insane, but we just kind of stuck together and knew that we weren't going to be denied and we were going to leave it all out there.

NICOLE MENDES: We just kind of came up there with a mindset that we weren't going to be denied, that we were going to have the will to win, that there was no way that we were going to walk off that field with any ounce of regret, and we just kind of left blood, sweat and tears out there on the field.

Q. Shay, just as a batter, how do you stay focused when it's inning after inning and it's those two pitchers, going back and forth between them? How do you stay focused and sane out there?

SHAY KNIGHTEN: I just kind of think to myself, you can do this, just stick to your mechanics, stay within yourself, do it for your teammates and not try to be too big, not try to be the hero. And I was just thinking one pitch at a time, just focus one pitch at a time and something will happen.

Q. Coach, talk about the chess match of pitcher to pitcher being in the circle and making the right

move at the right time, going back and forth with Lowary and Parker.

PATTY GASSO: Well, I think it was probably a surprise to some that we started Paige Lowary, but it was a team decision. It was a pitching staff, coaching staff decision. These two were right with us when we talked about it, and then we presented it to the team and they were all for it.

I loved what she did, and I loved what Paige (Parker) did, and I loved what Paige Lowary did to come back in, and you saw Florida doing the same exact thing. We were almost mirroring each other in what our strategies were. It was an emotional roller coaster for both of them. They came in and I felt like, I could have shut that down. It was highs and lows, and for Paige Lowary especially to finish on the note that she did, it was to me the highlight of our season.

Q. Paige Lowary, two thoughts as you were walking back onto the field from the bullpen, the bases loaded and the big situation there, and then the last strikeout, will you take me through your mind in those two situations?

PAIGE LOWARY: When I first came back in, I was just thinking that I'm kind of coming back in like a closing role, Paige Parker has pitched seven innings, so it's kind of like I'm closing another game, so I just tried to have a closing mindset with that, and then the last strikeout I just wanted to hit my spot and I visualized her swinging over it, and it went where it needed to go.

Q. Parker, just talk about being in the moment, going from one emotion to the other in the game, out of the game, watching from the dugout and then being out in the circle.

PAIGE PARKER: I think it's just staying locked in no matter where you are in the game, if you're in the circle or if you're in the dugout. It's just staying locked in constantly. I wanted to stay with Paige (Lowary) every single pitch. Whenever I was in the dugout, and I could feel her with me every single pitch whenever I was on the mound.

I think just trying to be level-headed and stay locked in constantly is the key whenever you have those kinds of situations.

Q. How did you handle dealing with the pitching matchups knowing that you've got potentially maybe even two more games after this one and you've got Mariah Lopez who's fresh and you've got Nicole Mendes who's fresh?

PATTY GASSO: I can't even answer that right now because I've got to check in on these guys --

Q. I meant during the game.

PATTY GASSO: During the game?

Q. How do you manage the two pitchers knowing that you've got to pitch two more games --

PATTY GASSO: I've gotcha. I was just going with what was hot and what we thought would be effective. So to put two freshmen out there right now in this heated battle just didn't seem fair to them at that moment, so I just stuck with these two and their experience.

Q. Nicole and Fale, what was it like being a part of a game like this, just knowing the stage that you ladies are on and what you're trying to accomplish? What was it like being a part of tonight that will go down as one of the greatest games ever played?

FALE AVIU: It was a fun game overall. It was a dogfight back and forth. Our team was not going to be denied, and we felt the power of three with our fans out there, with their hands up, and that was a good feeling to see everybody had each other's backs, everybody was going to be a leader and no one was going to give up.

NICOLE MENDES: I just will never forget this game as long as I live. I don't think I'll ever play in a game like this ever again. It was an honor to be a part of, and I think I speak for the whole team whenever I say that it was with the power of three and it was with the will to win and determination, and I think that Florida is a great team, and I think that it was a great battle.

Q. Paige, you've said that you enjoy the closer role and you've adapted to that. How do you change your mindset starting this game, and Paige Parker, you kind of reversed roles. How do you handle that?

PAIGE LOWARY: I mean, we talked about it as a pitching staff and a coaching staff this morning, and we came to the decision that I was going to start this morning and I just tried to keep the same mindset, I guess, just take it one pitch at a time and stay in the moment, and I don't know, just fight. I wanted to do it for everyone.

PAIGE PARKER: I would agree with Paige. It's just kind of keeping the same mindset of just trying to win every pitch, and I think earlier in the season we had some situations where Paige started and I came in to close, and I think that that was like a good thing to go back to of how that felt, and just trying to channel those experiences helped us today, I think.

Q. Patty, when you said you guys came to a determination this morning, what was it that you guys decided to start Paige (Lowary), what were kind of the factors in that?

PATTY GASSO: The history of how we've used Paige Parker was just starting every game, so I thought, what the heck, let's try -- we felt like (Kelly) Barnhill was going to come out, so it was two flame throwers going at it. It was good old fashioned softball, so that's kind of what we -- it was good to see them go against each other. That's kind of what we felt might happen. I think they may have been really planning for Paige Parker, so it was just throwing a wrench in there.

Q. Shay, this is for you. They battled back after Nicole's (Mendes) home run and then Fale's (Aviu) home run they battled back. Your home run gave you the biggest lead of the night. Did you kind of get a sense that maybe that was a back breaker, kind of the third-time-is-a-charm type deal, and also can you talk about the pitch? Was it something you were looking for? What were you thinking as you left the yard?

SHAY KNIGHTEN: Well, you can never think anything is a back breaker or anything with a team like Florida. Like they did all game, they came back. We were going to fight for whatever we could, and in my at-bat, I was just looking to find a pitch in the zone that I could hit hard. I wasn't looking for really a particular pitch. It was just something -- I knew she was throwing hard, so it's just get there, just get there, and if it was in the zone, I was going to swing.

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Tim Walton
Delanie Gourley
Kelly Barnhill
Sophia Reynoso
Amanda Lorenz
Florida

Oklahoma - 7, Florida - 5

TIM WALTON: Good game. Obviously we're not very happy to be up here right now as the other side of that, but we had a very good game. Two good teams, obviously fought very hard tonight. Just obviously the clutch hitting, they got a couple more than we did. But told my team in about the -- I don't know if it was the eighth or the 21st, whatever inning it was, I told them great job, proud of you guys. Two outs, two strikes, boom, came back. Two outs, two strikes, and whatever the next inning was, came back. So just really proud of our team, really proud of the effort, really proud of the energy. Had some kids step up and do some things they haven't been asked to do before, and this is the first time I've seen the box score so that's why it took me so long, but 26 strikeouts, it's crazy to lose. Just tells you just what a crazy game this is.

Yeah, again, proud of my team. Congratulations to Oklahoma. They played a great game, as well. Made a lot of nice plays. The crowd stayed with it. Apologize to them we're not signing autographs tonight. Obviously I had to send the bus back, get some rest and get ready for tomorrow. But like I said, proud of our team, proud of our effort, not happy with the result, but here we are.

Q. Obviously like you all, they have several pitchers on their staff that they're comfortable with, but the decision to start (Paige) Lowary, how did that affect things at all for you guys? Was it just a surprise and get over it and get going? How did that affect things?

TIM WALTON: I don't think it was -- we've hit the ball hard, so I don't think there was any surprise at all.

Q. Coach, I asked Coach (Patty) Gasso earlier about the chess match of your pitching staff tonight, which one to start, which one to -- how far to go, and then to make the changes late in the game, especially once it got to extra innings and be satisfied with that to finish out.

TIM WALTON: What was the question?

Q. As far as pitching in the circle.

TIM WALTON: I don't want to be rude. I don't understand what you're asking me to answer.

Q. The chess match of who to start the game, then you make a change late in the game, and once it gets to extra innings, to make another change and stay with that and finish.

TIM WALTON: OK, yeah. I mean, I just thought Delanie (Gourley) had given us all she had and it was time to make a change. I thought Kelly (Barnhill) gave us good seven and time to change looks, as well. But what we did tonight was really no different than we did in the past. Kelly goes on Friday night, Delanie goes on Saturday. Kelly pitched tonight on whatever night it is, Friday night, and Delanie came in on Saturday. We did the same thing. It really wasn't any different. I thought both coaches did exactly what they should have done, pulled the trigger at the right time, and she came in and put the fire out, and Delanie did the same. I thought the moves were great. I don't really -- offense, need to find a way to get a little hit here or there, but the pitching was great.

Q. Amanda, talk a little bit about just kind of the will to keep fighting back whenever they get ahead of you guys and ultimately when it was up by three you didn't come all the way back, but when it becomes a power of wills, talk about your mindset and what did you do to make sure you kept coming back?

AMANDA LORENZ: Yeah, I'm really proud of our team tonight. Obviously we're not really happy with the result, but to keep fighting back against a team like Oklahoma, you can't really ask more from our offense, one more run. But yeah, just being comfortable in the moment, taking a deep breath, not letting it get too big, just really, really, really proud of our fight tonight.

Q. Kelly and Delanie, you guys, any fatigue factor

at all?

DELANIE GOURLEY: I mean, not -- that didn't even cross my mind. Every time I went out there, all I wanted to do was get the quickest three outs so we could come in and try to score. That was probably due to a little bit of adrenaline, but any game I pitch, I never really feel any fatigue, and so I just wanted to keep focused.

KELLY BARNHILL: Yeah, I agree with what Delanie is saying. In the moment when you're out there, there's so much adrenaline you really don't feel it. Sometimes your pitching may be a result of it; sometimes you may miss a location and they'll make you pay for that. But you really just go out there and you give 100 percent of whatever is in the tank.

Q. Kelly and Delanie, are you guys communicating throughout the game, especially with you starting and throwing seven and then you throwing eight and then coming back in?

KELLY BARNHILL: No, not really. We have different styles of pitching, and so we just kind of -- pretty much we're just there for each other. We're there supporting each other, high fives, OK, good, you got out of that, or that's OK, we'll come back, that kind of thing. Not too much communicating about batters or things like that.

DELANIE GOURLEY: Yeah, I think just because we're both there, like we're watching and seeing the same things, but like she said, we have two completely different weapons. But right when I came out and she came in, I was like, Kelly, no one beats you, and she was like, no nobody beats us, so I think like I've been saying this whole week, that's a bond that not many people have, so really proud of us tonight. We did give it our all and so did the rest of our team. Yeah, just going to come out tomorrow and do the same thing.

Q. Sophia and Amanda, Oklahoma players were talking about their crowd. This is a championship game; did it feel hostile? Could you feel the home crowd that Oklahoma had tonight?

SOPHIA REYNOSO: I mean, they were loud, but I know that the one thing I tried to pay attention to was when our crowd came up and tried to one-up them. I think that kept us going in the game, that we tried not to let the loudness and the rowdiness of the other crowd get to us, and I think we did a good job of that and did a good job of communicating staying within our team.

AMANDA LORENZ: Yeah, I think that obviously their fans were great, big home-field advantage for them for sure. But when we're down by two runs or down by one run, two strikes, two outs and we come up clutch and tie up the game, obviously the crowd is not getting

to us that much. Just really, really proud of the way that we had our little section up there, Gator Nation cheering us on, and that's all we needed tonight, and we're just really excited for tomorrow. Obviously it didn't get to us that much if we have that much fight left in our tank, so just proud.

Q. Amanda, with a game that goes this long, how much of a sense of time do you keep as it goes along? Do you know the ninth from the 11th from the 13th or your fourth at-bat from your fifth at-bat?

AMANDA LORENZ: It's all a blur right now. All I know is we lost. That's what I know, and I'm really excited for tomorrow. I'm really proud of our fight. Excited to go to sleep and wake up. Tomorrow is a new day, and we're still in the national championship. We have two more games left, and I'm really proud to see what we have tomorrow because obviously we showed the softball world a really good game tonight, and we're not done yet. Just really proud.

Q. Coach, once again, it's always about the circle, whether it's baseball or softball. Tonight's game, there was only seven walks thrown between the two teams. Are we witnessing greatness this weekend in the circle?

TIM WALTON: Yeah. I mean, I watched a little bit of TV just seeing the matchups, and they kind of flashed up the batting averages and the wins over the last 10 years and the wins over the last four years in championships, and obviously you saw two even matched teams tonight. But I think there's great pitching. They've got another kid that they can throw tomorrow. We've got another kid or two we can throw tomorrow, so I think you're witnessing a lot of great pitching. The scores have been -- this tournament has been one of the best tournaments that I've been at. A lot of competitive games. We've had 3-1 games, 2-1 games, 1-0 games. I think you've got a lot of good pitching out there.