

2017 Women's College World Series

Friday, June 2, 2017
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Tim Walton

Kelly Barnhill

Chelsea Herndon

Aleshia Ocasio

Janell Wheaton

Florida

Florida - 7, LSU - 0

TIM WALTON: Yeah, just really proud of our team today for coming out really ready to play. We made some really good, nice defensive plays. Kelly (Barnhill) made some good pitches, early made some good pitches, late made some good pitches, and then I can't say enough about the lineup, just really finally hitting stride, but I think more than anything, just gained a little bit of confidence and going up there and actually looks like we're trying to get some hits.

I talked to our team after the game just about it being a simple game, and I think at the end of the day, it is. You've got to catch the ball, you've got to throw the ball, you've got to hit the ball, but execution is the key, and I thought we executed really, really well tonight, did a lot of nice things that some go noticed, some good unnoticed. We've got all these guys up here that are going to take questions, but Theresa Swertfager is getting on the bus, laying down a down two-strike bunt, and nothing bigger than having a role player step up in a big role and contributing to this team.

I think Delanie Gourley said it the other night the best on stage at the opening event that this team, there is no pecking order, we've got a lot of great players on this team and a lot of great kids on this team, and I think they really are showing how much they care for each other by playing well on this stage.

Q. Coach, this was your 40th shutout this season; how special is this pitching staff?

TIM WALTON: School record, so yeah, it's really special. We've got a saying, Jennifer (Rocha) and I have had a saying for a long, long time. 2007 we went to a Super Regional finals, we had just a mediocre team, but we played hard, and I told her if she doesn't

give up any runs we'll never lose, and that's kind of been our motto ever since. I know it sounds silly, but it's obvious. When our pitching staff shuts people out, we win, and really proud of not only their preparation, their work ethic, their confidence in not only themselves, their catcher, their defense, and our pitching coach, and they do a really good job of planning. Coach Rocha was driving with a couple iPads today with the phone and barely a little bit of breakfast, and then we changed our plans up with the weather today, so we went and did something a little different, and she said, all right, good, I've got a little more time to prepare. Just really proud of the way our team competes but proud of their preparation. I think that it goes a long ways.

Q. Chelsea, your hit got everything going. What happened at that at-bat? What did you see? And then Janell, could you respond to how that might have got the dugout going?

CHELSEA HERNDON: Yeah, I just tried to stay calm. In those big moments in the World Series, it comes in clutch whenever -- you just have to stay calm. I just really wanted to get it done for my team. We all want to do everything for one another, and when I just saw a good pitch, I took a hack at it, and that's the main things, you really just have to stay calm and relaxed and just realize it's just a game. We go and prepare and do all this work and whenever the time comes and that moment is there, just live in the moment and just -- and I just took a hack, and I'm grateful that I came through.

JANELL WHEATON: First couple innings we had runners in scoring position. Amanda (Lorenz) led off the game really well, and we just needed that one hit to get us going, and Chelsea is the one that got it done for us and she's the one that started the rally and got -- like you said, hitting is contagious so Chelsea is the one that got it done for us today.

Q. Coach Walton, how do you feel about how your pitching staff is set up? She didn't have to throw a whole lot of pitches yesterday, got a day off. You've got other pitchers to throw.

TIM WALTON: Yeah, I think to be honest with you, it's the greatest position to be in in the College World Series is be on an off day on Saturday. It's a great spot to be in, just because you have an opportunity where

somebody has to come through and beat you twice. It's a good spot. Again, if we've got to go until 1 in the morning on Sunday morning or into Monday morning with our pitching staff, I'm always confident in them, so having a day and a little bit of rest, we'll figure it out. But my radio guy asked me who we're going to go with in the circle, I always wait until the last minute to tell him, and he asked me today, who are you going to, (Kelly) Barnhill and (Delanie) Gourley, and I said the same thing yesterday. I anticipate that will be the way we'll go the rest of the way out.

Q. I know how much you pride yourself on defense. When Aleshia (Ocasio) went out there, sacrifices her body and does that for the team today, how much did that fire up you and the rest of the team?

TIM WALTON: Yeah, that was close. I was very happy for Aleshia making that play. We were in I call it a hat-off position where we're not going to catch any deep foul balls we can't throw the runner out at the plate with in that situation, and she goes. I'm not going to catch the ball, first of all, but I'm falling into the photography well, and she found her way somehow to balance herself and get ready to have the sense to get ready to throw the girl out at the plate. Heads up to her and her teammates. Amanda (Lorenz) was coming in from the outfield talking to her, as well. Very athletic play, especially in a new environment, really in a new position. It's probably only her sixth game playing there all year long. So give her a lot of credit. I thought she really made a tremendously athletic play.

Q. Chelsea, obviously you've had a rough start to your postseason; what goes into digging yourself out of that little bit of a slump that you went through, and what were your emotions like when you see that ball go down the right field line?

CHELSEA HERNDON: Yeah, I try not to really think about all the other at-bats and getting into a slump. I try to take every pitch by pitch. Getting that contact felt amazing, and seeing my team's reaction once I reached second base, I just -- that's who I want to do it for. I want to do for the team. We work so hard, and big moments like that, it's so awesome when you're successful in the College World Series on the biggest stage, so that was -- it just meant a lot to me to finally get that clutch hit for my team.

Q. Coach, I don't know if you're going to be able to escape an SEC team again, seems like that's all you're playing. If you could just comment on this run of SEC teams you're playing, and also, was it to your advantage that you hadn't faced A & M and LSU yet do you think?

TIM WALTON: That's a lot of questions. I think I told our athletic director and Commissioner Sankey that I'd like to see them move back the athletic director and

head coaches' meetings that they have in Destin every year because there's so many teams at the College World Series every year. I'll be honest with you, I told my radio guy the same thing, gosh, I'm sick and tired of playing the SEC teams. It's tough. And again, everybody in our league prepares so hard for each other for a three-game series that it does create a different matchup when you get to this point.

I think the only advantage really is that they hadn't seen Kelly Barnhill, and I think other than that, preparation is pretty equal for both opponents. But they hadn't seen Kelly Barnhill, and they probably went in with a game plan of Kelly Barnhill from last year, and she's not that pitcher, so I think that's the advantage that I've seen so far.

Q. Aleshia, Coach talked about how you played third base probably for the sixth time. Talk about your adjustment to playing that position. I know most of this year you were in right field. What has gone into preparing for that position, especially today and making those great plays?

ALESHIA OCASIO: Well, you know, every day I come to practice, and I'm running around. I'm practicing in right field. I'm taking some ground balls in the circle and I'm also practicing at third base. Whenever Coach puts me that day is where I'm going to dedicate myself 100 percent, and I made those plays for Kelly, I made those plays for the team, and just so happens that he put me at third today and yesterday, and I did whatever I could to get some outs.

Q. Did you play at those positions growing up, or has this been new this year?

ALESHIA OCASIO: You know, growing up I was an infielder, so it wasn't entirely new to me, but from freshman year to now I did have to get better in the infield, and now I'm confident. It just worked out that way.

Q. Kelly, your second start in the World Series; does it feel any different, emotions any different than just being out there yesterday and especially I believe they had the four lead-off runners on in four innings, defense did well behind you, but was anything different?

KELLY BARNHILL: No, I don't really think I went about it any differently. Didn't have quite as many butterflies as yesterday with the first start in the arena with so many people out there, but I just really tried to go out there and just play pitch by pitch. Had a little bit of trouble finding the zone, as you mentioned, with the lead-off batters getting on, but we settled in, my defense did amazing, Aleshia's plays were mindblowing, that catch in the photography well was amazing, and our offense just went out there and got it

done again, and so it's so exciting to be in the dugout, and I'm on my feet cheering, bouncing up and down. It's just so much fun in there with everything that's going on out there.

Q. Tim, with the roles that Aleshia Ocasio) has played for you this season, how soon after you walked off the field against Georgia in the super regional did you know that that was going to be the role that you were going to ask her to play this year?

TIM WALTON: Well, I think she asked me to play the role to be honest with you. I think at the end-of-the-year meeting we talked about her role, and I talked to her at the end of the season last year and just made it perfectly clear that her one pitch didn't cost us the game. It just so happened to be the last play of the game, but we had a lot of opportunities to do things in that series that we just didn't get done. She wanted to hit more, and I told her I'd get her double at-bats. I said, hey, you're going to double up your bats next year, don't worry about that, and I think two days later she sent me a text message that said, hey, I only had 41 at-bats; I hope I get more than 80. I told her that to be honest with her, I told her that defense is the key, I wanted her to take fly balls in the outfield, right and left, take ground balls at second and third, and then also do some work over at first base.

About three quarters of the way through the summer she had a little pitching lesson. She sent me her picture with her in her catcher's gear and said, I can catch, too, if you need it. Those are all true stories. She said that. But she was the one that really reached to me and said I want to play more, I want to be more of an everyday player, and she probably would have been more of an everyday player if our pitching staff hadn't really taken -- Kelly (Barnhill) and Delanie (Gourley) have gone from here to here. They're so much better this year than they were last year, and it afforded us the opportunity to put her in multiple positions. She hasn't gotten any worse pitching-wise they've just really gotten a lot better, and it helps the team by her playing different positions.

Q. Is there a 2017 version of the funnel cakes from three years ago?

TIM WALTON: Well, we had a funnel cake the other night, and it's funny, I went up to Amanda (Lorenz), I think it was the third inning, I said, hey, Amanda, if we win this game we're going to get funnel cakes, and she looked at me with a straight face and said, Coach, I don't need any more motivation, I've waited my whole life to get to the College World Series. But we took pictures. I think some people FaceTimed out to Bailey Castro and got some funnel cakes. Whatever it takes to win. Whatever it takes to motivate our athletes, if it's

funnel cakes, if it's -- what else you guys need, just let me know, we'll take care of it. They're doing a good job. The preparation we put in has been outstanding, and I'm just excited to allow these kids an opportunity to hang out with their families a couple more days here at the College World Series and get to enjoy this moment.