

# 2016 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, June 8, 2016  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



**Patty Gasso**  
**Paige Parker**  
**Shay Knighten**  
**Erin Miller**  
**Fale Aviu**  
**Lea Wodach**  
Oklahoma

Oklahoma - 2, Auburn - 1

THE MODERATOR: At this time we have University of Oklahoma on the dais.

PATTY GASSO: Well, first of all, I have to in victory or defeat, in this group we give God the glory. We took a journey that he led us on, and we just continued to work hard as a group. A lot of people talked about us being young, and we never let that give us any reason for excuse.

Before I get into anything, I want to thank everybody that participated in helping this event go on from All Sports Association and our great University of Oklahoma. I thought the umpiring, so forth, was fantastic, and the NCAA and all those who helped, we really appreciate putting on such a great event.

And I also need to absolutely congratulate Auburn. What a great team. Very well-coached. They made us have to play so much better. They made us better. Clint Myers and his staff are tremendous. They do their homework. They knew what they were doing. They have some great athletes, and I congratulate them. They definitely were one of the toughest teams we've faced this season.

I felt our team definitely took the hard road through this. We had to open up with Alabama, and that was a very tough game, and then on to -- who did we play next? Michigan, LSU. We played some of the best in the country, so I definitely feel like this team earned every second of our success because they played from the first pitch to the last.

I can't say enough about not just Paige Parker but the whole team playing great defense behind her. Tonight was a tribute to a great pitching performance who shut down a very potent offense and a defense that made incredible plays behind her. We came out strong early, scored first, and then we got stagnant, and I will give -- (Makayla) Martin did a great job of keeping us a little off balance. I could feel like our bodies looked like they were getting tired, and we just couldn't get our legs into things and get the ball through the infield.

But they did a nice job of keeping us into ground-outs and not really allowing us to get really our legs into things. But that's part of the -- this team was starting to run out of gas, so it was just pure adrenaline and love for team that kept them going tonight.

**Q. Patty, you stayed in the dugout through much of the early celebration, team dog piling. Walk me through what you were thinking in those moments, and can I ask Shay and Erin, Coach mentioned the fact that you didn't use the young nature of this team as an excuse. How did she rally you guys together to make this run?**

PATTY GASSO: I first thing went to my knees. It was a very stressful week, and that's all I could do. Took a breath, turned around, saw JT (Gasso). At first I saw Coach (Melyssa) Lombardi, and we were just kind of crying on each other because we both felt a tremendous amount of pressure because we love this team so much, we don't want to mess it up for them. And it's the hardest thing to do is be a pitching coach because every pitch you live with the pitcher on. So I'm so, so proud of her and JT, where people might have thought, really, you're hiring your son, so I hope that's confirmation that he's pretty good. I turned around and found him, my daughter-in-law Andrea (Gasso). What a great job she did. The team was celebrating, and I just needed to celebrate my staff because they were phenomenal and I wanted them to see me first, and the team was caught up in each other.

SHAY KNIGHTEN: For me, it was more of Coach (Patty Gasso) just not letting me think I was a freshman, and that goes for the whole team. They allowed me to just come in and play free. They said, well, even though you're a freshman, you're going to have to step up one way or another, and so I kind of took that to heart and was

like, okay, I've got you guys. I'm going to figure this out. Even though I'm a freshman I'm not going to be too big, do anything out of what I've already done, and just help you guys to the best of my ability, and I couldn't thank Coach or the seniors or anybody else on my team enough for it.

ERIN MILLER: Yeah, I think the first thing that Coach mentioned when this year started was that we're never going to use the excuse that we were young and that kind of set the stakes for the rest of the year. Our mantra for the year was team. We lost some really good seniors, and we weren't going to let that defeat us, and I think this team really took that upon themselves to prove to the nation that we can do it without those big names. Our freshmen absolutely stepped up. They played like veterans the entire year. They're going to do some amazing things in years to come.

**Q. Patty, you had to make a tough decision yesterday, and of course things didn't work out in the end, but you had Parker come back and she was outstanding today, which proves, again, you're one of the best coaches in the country. Your decisions, you're always convinced in what you're going to do. But still, when you woke up today and you got ready today, were you feeling pretty good about things?**

PATTY GASSO: Yeah, yeah. It was a tough deal, but I -- and I appreciate your comments, but it was a team decision. I mean, I talked with our coaching staff. We shared it with the team. We talked with Paige (Parker). It was about her gas tank and where it was, and I think now we can talk about it. Are you okay with that? I think Paige would tell you that she was yesterday -- when she threw the first game against Auburn, her tank was about half full, so to be half-full and beating them, that's pretty big because they're just a very, very good offense.

When I talked to her on Tuesday morning after an ice bath, I think it was at a third of a tank, which is not enough to beat that team. And if we would have tried and put her out there, even in the third when we had a lead, I don't know that -- my heart is with this kid first, and to put her in a non-winning potential situation, I couldn't do that because she helped us get here. So it was, you know, we're going to do the best we can to win that game on Tuesday, give her rest. The only way I would have brought her in is if we would have scored and she saw her go down late.

The fact that we didn't score and we didn't use her, I sent her a text this morning, and she didn't answer it, so it scared me a little bit. But I think her comment was 75 percent, and when you add adrenaline in that, you

probably get to 85 to 90 percent, and that would give us a chance to win a championship.

Thank you, Paige, for filling your gas tank.

**Q. I know you all dream of playing here, but just what did it mean to you all to be able to celebrate this in front of all that crimson?**

PAIGE PARKER: It was one of the most fantastic feelings that I've ever had in my whole life. Our fans this year have been so vital to all of the things that we've done. They've supported us so much, and to have all of them here and to have all of our families here, as well, just meant so much to us, and it was just incredible to get to share this feeling with them, as well.

SHAY KNIGHTEN: Sooner Nation, I don't even know what to say about them. They're incredible. To look up in between innings, even during an inning, to see them smiling down at us saying you guys got this, yelling for us, screaming for us, doing whatever they can to keep us going, it's huge for us, and we couldn't thank them any more and I couldn't thank them any more, especially being a freshman, seeing this first hand, it's unbelievable, especially seeing them on TV. You always want to be in that position, and for me to see that, it's huge.

ERIN MILLER: Yeah, I would say the connection this team has with their fans is very, very special. We have something that a lot of programs don't, and that's Sooner tradition. This university is something incredible, and I think anyone that's a part of it could say that.

As a senior, I can't thank our fans enough. Playing here has been the greatest four years of my life.

FALE AVIU: Sooner Nation has been amazing, just looking up there into the stands like Shay (Knighten) was saying and seeing everyone's hands up knowing that they got us and we got them was just so much fun, and being a freshman and seeing that and being a part of this was such an amazing feeling.

LEA WODACH: I have to agree with everyone. Just looking out and seeing all the red, especially from behind home, I get a cool view of the whole outfield packed with crimson and cream. There's nothing better than that. And I know at one point, too, we had the infield and the outfield screaming Boomer Sooner, and at that point I'm like, we're in this we got this. No matter what happens, our fans are behind us, and there's not a better feeling.

**Q. Paige, as it turns out obviously you were healthy and fully rested today. How big was it for those**

**two to eat up innings yesterday as it turns out now?**

PAIGE PARKER: Kelsey (Stevens) and Jayden (Chestnut) did a fantastic job yesterday, and I couldn't be more proud of them. They've worked so hard this whole year, and I'm just so proud of the heart and the fight that they showed. You know, after the game they both talked to me, and they were like, go out and do it for the pitching staff. That meant so much to me because we're out in the bullpen, the four of us, every day together, and we see how much each other fight and how much we all work so hard. It was just really special what they did yesterday. Even though we didn't get the outcome that we wanted yesterday, what they did was phenomenal, and I'm just so proud of them.

**Q. Paige, you retired the final 12 batters you faced. Was there an extra gear you kind of kicked it into, and describe that for us?**

PAIGE PARKER: I definitely think that there was. Their pitcher was doing a great job, and I knew how important it was to keep their offense off balance so that our offense could have a little bit of wiggle room because I know how hard our offense was fighting to score off of her, and she did a great job. So I just kind of took myself to another level and just went into another gear, and I was willing to do whatever I had to do to help this team win.

**Q. Paige, Auburn was talking about they were looking forward to seeing you again because they felt like they kind of had a beat on what you were doing in Game 1. How much were you looking forward to seeing them in Game 3?**

PAIGE PARKER: I was pretty excited. They are a very good offensive team, and they are a very well-coached team, and I knew that they were going to come out and fight. I had to get myself mentally prepared, and I give a lot of credit to Coach Lombardi. This whole year she has worked so hard at preparing us for each team that we were going to face, and she came out and we had a really, really good game plan against them. It was just going out there and executing it. I just give a lot of credit to her and a lot of credit to Lea (Wodach). I couldn't have done anything without the two of them, and our other pitchers, as well.

It's just a testament to how fantastic of a pitching coach Coach Lombardi is.

**Q. Coach, she's come such full circle when you look at what happened last year in Tuscaloosa. How ironic was the ball was in her hands to win a World Series?**

PATTY GASSO: You know, I'll never forget that moment with Paige in Alabama, truly she went from a girl to a woman in one weekend, and I knew that things would

change for her since she started her sophomore campaign.

I think it's pretty relative how we faced Alabama out in Fullerton. Paige threw well. She did it here again. And just to see her continue to live in another level that -- elite, elite athletes can get there. Not every athlete can. Paige found that place in Alabama last year, and I almost have to be somewhat grateful that we had to go through that experience because we wouldn't be here if she didn't.

**Q. If you go back to January or February, what sense did you have of what this team's potential could be in 2012 and 2013 at the same stage?**

PATTY GASSO: They're all laughing. I didn't know. I think at the start of our season we went out to UNLV, and we lost I think our first two games. We were 0-2. We lost to Minnesota and we lost to Washington. It was almost panic from the first weekend. All of us were like, wow, wait, what happened? They were scared, very tight, and I think we just started to understand -- and they're going to laugh when I say this word because every time I say it they laugh, but the word freedom is about what this group is about.

The freedom to make mistakes. They can be good mistakes because you can learn from them, and that is why this group can be so loose because they just can play the way they need to play without me pointing my finger in their face or anybody -- the only reason -- only time I would get on them is if they didn't put out maximum effort. Besides that, we just had to learn a lot, and the more we played the better they got, but they had this tenacious energy about them that they love competition, they love challenges, and they don't like to be beat. They take it very personal.

But them together as a team is so powerful and so strong.

**Q. Paige, you had some rough early innings that you had runners on and no outs, and it just seemed to almost -- something seemed to galvanize in you in those situations. What was going through your head, your body, just everything in those moments?**

PAIGE PARKER: Just do not -- I just couldn't -- I just was determined to not let them score. I knew how hard our offense was working, and I wanted them to have freedom to play. And so it was just about going out there and in those tough situations being even tougher. Going to another level and just being determined to not let them score.

**Q. Patty, a lot of the talk recently has been about your freshmen and your underclassmen. Can you talk about the role that your seniors had on this team, and then Erin, can you talk about your role throughout the season and then recently in the last couple of games?**

PATTY GASSO: It was, I think, July or maybe early August, I had Kady Self and Erin Miller come to my house, and we were going to make some coaching changes, and I presented them with the idea of JT (Gasso), and they knew JT, and I needed their blessing and their thumbs up on that, and they did, and they bought in, and they really worked hard to help him fit with his new style, which isn't so new. It's still the same kind of swing plan and so forth, but it has a little more aggressiveness to it. And then we talked about the amount of freshmen we have and how important they're going to be on this team, and they welcomed them with open arms because I don't know when they were freshmen that they were treated the same way, and I think they had an idea, when we're seniors we're not going to be like that. We're going to take them in and we're going to teach them and we're going to love on them and we're going to make them feel welcome and a part of this team, and they knew that they needed to because they're good. They're very talented, and we needed them in the lineup.

It was such an important part of our success. The seniors owned this team. They did it right, from Paris Townsend helping us get involved as a team, and Erin and Kady, Kelsey Stevens, Tori Nirschl, they all kind of bonded together and said, let's see what we can do with this group and leave a legacy and teach them the right way, and we would not be here without them doing that, no question.

ERIN MILLER: I think as a senior class, what we wanted to do was create a new atmosphere, and no matter what the outcome was going to be at the end of the year, we wanted this team to know that this is how a team is supposed to feel, especially with this young class. We knew they were going to be imperative to our success, so bringing them in and making them feel like a part of this group as soon as we could was our ultimate goal.

I think obviously a championship is the icing on the cake, but our goal was really to create a new tradition of this is how Sooner softball lives. We're a unit. We live and die together, and I think we succeeded with that.

**Q. Erin, I just want to ask, against Kansas, your last loss before this series, you said it was laborsome. I think everybody watches you now and doesn't feel that way about this team. What changed?**

**What did you guys do to make it more fun, make it more enjoyable to be out there on the field?**

ERIN MILLER: I think this whole year we've really focused on letting our personalities shine, having fun, playing loose, playing free (laughter), so I think that has really been something that we've clung to was just being ourselves no matter what the situation is. That was really the talk before this game was don't change who you are; that's how we got to this point. We went back there, and I think that's just who we are. That's how this team lives.

**Q. Lea, nobody knows about a pitching performance better than the catcher, so if you could take us through Paige's performance today, and if you could take us through the RBI single, that would be great.**

LEA WODACH: Yeah, Paige (Parker), just from Monday to now just watching film, we worked a lot with Coach Lombardi, us and the pitching staff and broke down their swings just from Monday to today. We spent several hours doing that, and I think we made a few adjustments here and there and she was incredible. I think Paige could admit her changeup, it wasn't working for the past couple of games. We've been struggling with it. A couple of different things, we looked at it, figured it out, and I think that was a big difference in today's game. But yeah, she was just nailing every spot tonight. She had a lot of tight spin, hitting the corners, working with the umpire. I can't say enough about how well she did and how she stepped up, and I know someone commented earlier about how she went to another level with the last 12 batters. Absolutely, she didn't miss. Everything she threw was on point. We had a purpose with every pitch. Going into every batter, she knew I'm going to get this one and we knew how we were going to go at it, and I think she did an awesome job of executing the plan, and hats off to Coach Lombardi, as well, for helping with that.

FALE AVIU: I think when I was going up there, I was thinking just get a base hit, just get on. We had two outs and I got the base hit. I ran it out (laughter), second time, not once but twice. Yeah, I was just trying to beat it out for my teammates and just give it all I had. If I fall, I fall, we still score. So yeah.

**Q. Fale and Shay, it's not long ago you guys were playing travel ball and were finishing up your high school careers. What has the last year of your lives been like culminating with this tonight?**

SHAY KNIGHTEN: Well, for me and Fale (Aviu), we were on, I guess, rival travel ball teams, and we all know how that one turned out. But to be Fale's teammate, it's incredible. I think for both of us, this year has turned our worlds around. We see a whole new light. We see what

family and what team really means to us, and I couldn't thank Fale enough for being there for me, making me laugh, being one of my dance partners along with Erin Miller here. It's fun, and Fale is a competitor, and I love being her teammate.

FALE AVIU: Yeah, in travel ball it was always me and Shay (Knighten) going at it on two rival teams, and just in high school and pushing and everything, like through travel ball it was always me against Shay, me against Shay, and then finally coming together on the same team with Syd (Romero) on the same team, she was on my team, too, and finally going all together, it was such a fun experience. And dancing together now with Erin (Miller) and CC (Caleigh Clifton) and Shay, it's just a fun experience, fun to be around.

**Q. Auburn coach Clint Myers said after the first win that they were trying to prove they belong with teams like Oklahoma, Arizona, Alabama. Can you say they've arrived? Will they be a team that's going to be here annually?**

PATTY GASSO: Absolutely. Absolutely. They're good. They're good. They're well-coached. They're good athletes. They don't make a lot of mistakes. It was a little uncharacteristic, I think, some of the things that were going on. But on a big stage like that, sometimes when you want something so bad, mistakes can happen.

But you have to have a masterful performance like Paige (Parker) had to beat a team like that. And their pitching staff is good. They did a good job. They earned every right to be in this game. They made us have to go to another level to beat them. They were intense games, hard-fought, very even teams. Same kind of style, we both do have the same kind of style. So yeah, I absolutely expect Auburn will be around for a long time.