

2015 Women's College World Series

Monday, June 1
Florida 3 - Michigan 2



Florida

An Interview with:
COACH TIM WALTON
LAUREN HAEGER
ALESHIA OCASIO
DELANIE GOURLEY

THE MODERATOR: At this time we have Florida head coach Tim Walton, student-athlete Lauren Haeger, student-athlete Aleshia Ocasio and student-athlete Delanie Gourley. At this time we'll have general comments from Coach about the game.

COACH WALTON: Well, just what a great job by the pitchers on both sides. Both teams pitched very well. But you gotta give a lot of credit to the freshman and sophomore coming in on this big stage, coming out and pitch and hold a really good team, a really good offense of Michigan down. Just thought they pitched a good game. Offensively we didn't get a whole lot going except for what Lauren was able to create. But I thought overall we did a good job scoring early, and I think that does change the way people can swing at the College World Series. So I think more than just anything just tip my cap to Lauren (Haeger), offensively, and Delanie (Gourley) and Aleshia (Ocasio). Aleshia pitched a wonderful game, really did a good job getting strikeouts when she needed to and some really good defense behind her.

Q. Tim, what gave you so much faith in a freshman and a sophomore who hadn't pitched a whole lot over the past few weeks?

COACH WALTON: I think what we were able to do last year obviously helps me because of making the right decision, knowing what's right for our program. Over the last two seasons we really just talked about trying to create a good pitching staff. And we've been able to get Aleshia (Ocasio) some quality innings in the SEC and have her matched up against some quality opponents preseason and even Delanie (Gourley). That was the key. Lauren (Haeger) could have pitched tonight but we thought to ourselves if she doesn't pitch well then what? At least, win or lose, we still have Lauren Haeger to go to over the next couple of days if we need to. So I think that was the big key, just not overextending. She didn't throw 168 pitches in her career in a game. So no reason to extend her on short rest, give her the day off. She didn't throw. She didn't

long catch. Just played catch and we'll see how good she is tomorrow if we decide to throw her.

Q. Delanie, can you talk about the situation you hadn't pitched since Tennessee in the SEC tournament, and to be out there, all of a sudden it's first and third, game on the line, what was going through your mind?

DELANIE GOURLEY: I mean, it was a big-time pressure situation, but they prepared us every game and every game they tell us we're going to need our whole pitching staff. And all week Lili (Aleshia Ocasio) and I have been behind Lauren (Haeger)'s back and we've been ready at any moment. And at that time I was ready to execute and make my pitches.

Q. Delanie, how does it feel to come into the game in the biggest stage of college softball and get a save in front of your mom?

DELANIE GOURLEY: It's awesome. I love that she was here to watch, as well as my brother and my dad. It's just so much adrenaline. And I've earned this role. For most of the season as a reliever and as a closer, and I just did it again.

Q. Coach, you said you would need your entire pitching staff your entire pitching staff is with you at the podium. How does it feel to use all of them in one game especially against Michigan?

COACH WALTON: We've built our team on pitching and defense. I've heard other quotes and comments about what it takes. And I think you gotta kind of pitch and do what you do with your team. And we have a lot of faith in our defense. Katie (Kathlyn) Medina is not up here right now, but what a phenomenal play that she made up the middle to save the game for us. So I have a lot of confidence in our pitching and defense. They worked their butts off. They throw six days a week and really work on what they need to do and master their craft. And they really showed a nice, wonderful kind of assortment of pitches tonight. I'm really proud of the way the two pitched.

Q. Lauren, could you talk about what these two young pitchers did tonight? And second of all, what it does for you in this situation that it changes for you going forward?

LAUREN HAEGER: First of all, I'm so proud of them. They worked so hard, just like I do. And they deserve

what they did tonight. Aleshia (Ocasio) is amazing and Delanie (Gourley) is amazing, and I've said the whole time that I am going to need them to have my back throughout this whole entire tournament. And they're just so great, and I couldn't be any more proud of them. So happy for them. It's such a good win for them tonight.

Q. Aleshia you said they tell you every game we'll need all of you, and everybody needs to be ready but they haven't needed you here yet. What are some of the things you keep yourself mentally ready to go in the game throughout this last week?

ALESHIA OCASIO: When I'm throwing my bullpens, going out there with a stand-in. So they're coming in there and helping me prepare for batters that are coming up in the lineup. Basically everyone contributes to me being mentally prepared. Me and (Jennifer) Rocha talk about it. Me, Lauren (Haeger) and Delanie (Gourley) talk about it. And that's basically what prepares me.

Q. Lauren, on your home run, I think it was a 12-pitch at bat there. Does that get frustrating when you're up there that long and you're still waiting for that right pitch? And how do you stay focused, even if you're getting frustrated?

LAUREN HAEGER: As a batter, no, as a batter, no. As a pitcher, yes. But as a batter, not at all. I just go up there, try to foul off as many pitches as I can. I'll take my walks if I need to. I was seeing the ball really well and I was on time. I was really looking for a pitch to hit and fouling off what I didn't like.

Q. Lauren, could you explain how you and some of your teammates were able to get so much success against (Megan) Betsa but not so much against (Haylie) Wagner?

LAUREN HAEGER: I think we were just swinging against good pitches. We had a good plan. We watched video and we prepared as well as we needed to do.

Q. Delanie, you hadn't pitched in this NCAA Tournament but you did pitch last year, including Game 2 against Alabama. How much do you think that experience helped you tonight, and maybe remind us about how that outing went for you? I know it was like two shutout innings, but I don't know if you had to work out of any jams. And quick follow up for Lauren, all your RBIs were two outs, what your two-out approach is when batting?

DELANIE GOURLEY: I think having the experience from last year it really carried over to this year. There's a ton of people watching, and it just made it that much easier to know that I've been there before, and I could help my team in any way I could.

LAUREN HAEGER: I think in the first inning there was one out. But I was just trying to get Stew (Kelsey Stewart) in however I could -- deep fly ball, any way, that's just my plan, get it out of the infield. But the other two-out hit, I was looking for a pitch again. I was seeing the ball really well. I was ready to hit whatever.

Q. Following up on the question about (Megan) Betsa. She struggled this World Series. Was there something -- did you think she could be rattled? And also could you expand a little bit on what (Haylie) Wagner did today and I know you said you watched film, maybe what you've seen from her this World Series?

LAUREN HAEGER: Again, we just had a good plan. She's a great pitcher. Both of them are. They've gotten themselves to this stage. So there's something to say for that. But, again, we just do our research and we have a great plan for these pitchers. And that's really all I can say is we have a good plan, but they both are really good and they both have their stuff.

COACH WALTON: We struggled with (Megan) Betsa this year, both times we faced her. I think we won the first one 2-1, and the second one I think we scored a little bit later in the game. But we've struggled with (Haylie) Wagner, did I say Betsa -- Wagner. We only faced Betsa for a couple of innings the third time through. So Haylie's got good spin, she locates well, she's a senior. She knows what she's doing. Her motion is very, it's a lot of motion, and the ball gets on you quick. And I think that's -- I always look at her stats see that her strikeouts aren't super, super high, but she gets a lot of jam-shot ground balls, a lot of early outs in their at-bats. I think all that has to do with deception and the spin and the rotation of the ball.

Q. Coach, while you tend to develop a deep bullpen that you can go to throughout, we see most of the teams who reach here just rely on one pitcher, maybe two. How tough is it to develop that type of a bullpen where you can have three or four pitchers coming in anytime you need it?

COACH WALTON: It's not easy. You've got to deal with the personalities a little bit because each one of these three up here could be a No. 1 pitcher at a lot of places. And each one of these pitchers have been a No. 1 pitcher probably even through this season, to be honest with you. I think we work really hard on the character and team-building side of our program. And I think each one of them, I mean I've recruited all three of them. Lauren (Haeger) was coming to a program that really didn't have a whole lot of history. Where Delanie (Gourley) was coming to a program that had history, but wanted to make history. And Aleshia (Ocasio) came to a program because she also wanted

to be a part of the College World Series and get on this stage. So they all understood what they were doing when they came here. I think each one of them is going to leave their mark in a different way when they leave here. But I think the big thing is they wanted to share in success of a program and a coaching staff they really felt comfortable with. But it's a non-stop, 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week job for us to try to keep each one of them happy. And that's what we try to do as coaches. Try to keep them happy. With Lauren, she's a hitter. So early in the season I didn't pitch her as much because I could get more players to play when she went through middles of the week and stuff. So it's been a struggle for me, because they're all really good. But I think we've developed a personal relationship with each one of them and they trust us.

Q. Lauren, sorry for pushing here a little bit but would you talk a little bit more about what that plan was at the plate again today?

COACH WALTON: No.

Q. Aleshia, I want to ask you, how did Lauren (Haeger)'s home run settle you down confidence-wise early in the game?

ALESHIA OCASIO: It definitely did settle me down, I can say that much. But just coming in and pitching and just trying to -- hold runs down to a minimum. It was just calming to know that we had runs on the board. So it was just easier and calmed me down as well in the circle.

Q. Delanie what was the moment like with your mother on the cancer walk?

DELANIE GOURLEY: It's so special. I don't even know how to explain it, really, when you experience that. But to know that other girls on my team have also experienced it, Bailey (Castro)'s mother was out there, Kayli (Kvistad)'s mother was out there. Katie (Kathlyn) Medina's mom didn't go down there, but she's gone through it too. But it makes our team bond so much stronger and we really are family and we love each other, and we love our moms too.

Q. Lauren, before the game you were talking to Aleshia outside of the dugout. What did you say to her before she went out there for the first time?

LAUREN HAEGER: Just try to pump her up and tell her how good she is. Aleshia (Ocasio)'s so good. She has some dirty stuff. And I envy her for that because I don't have that. And I was just trying to pump her up, get her confident, tell her that she is good enough and that we are going to need her to go out there and shut them down like she did.

Q. I believe you've played on this field before and won a gold national championship; is that right?

ALESHIA OCASIO: Yes.

Q. What comfort level did that give you that you've already had success here even though it's a bigger stage here tonight, that you've been here and been successful, how did that help you tonight?

ALESHIA OCASIO: Definitely familiar with the field but coming on the field again for the national championship and the World Series, it's a different environment. So I was relying on my team and the experience that they have to really guide me through the series.

Q. Coach, you talked in the preseason Aleshia still being part thrower part pitcher. How did she get here?

COACH WALTON: A lot of work. We always joke that she's got more tools in her toolbox probably than anybody on our team. She's super athletic. She can jump really high. Pounded for pound, she can probably -- she's got a great athletic body. She does so many things well. She can run. She can hit. She can play shortstop. She can pitch. I just felt like before she was just trying to throw. Now she's learned how to control her speeds a little bit more and pitch a little bit better. I didn't mention that she can also dance. And she can sing and do all kinds of other stuff. So she's just fun. And I think "raw" was probably the word I saw out of her the most when I first saw her, she's just raw. She has so much upside. When she gets her rise ball mastered and when she gets the drop ball mastered, it's going to be really tough to hit her down the road because that rise ball is really, really good, and it's at different speeds. When we get her to throw it harder and when you get it to throw it slower, she's going to be tough to beat down the road when she kind of masters her command a little bit.

Q. Tim, when you're watching (Sierra) Romero on those, she had two chances to potentially go home, what was going through your mind, you've been obviously in that situation the indecision there?

COACH WALTON: You know, I don't know what the first indecision was. Maybe fly the ball. The ball was hit so hard that by the time she fielded it, it looked as though she was going back because of the way the ball was hit. After Katie (Kathlyn Medina) touched the bag and spun, I thought she was going again. But it looked as though Katie was coming towards 4. So I think she then saw that. That's what I saw from where I was at in the dugout. What her coach talked to her about, what she was looking for how they were looking to advance, obviously I don't have that for you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.