

2018 Women's College World Series

Sunday, June 3, 2018
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Patty Gasso
Paige Parker
Paige Lowary
Lea Wodach
Nicole Pendley
Jocelyn Alo
Oklahoma Sooners

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THE MODERATOR: This is the Game 11 press conference, featuring the Sooners of the University of Oklahoma, we're joined by head coach Patty Gasso, and student-athletes Jocelyn Alo, Nicole Pendley, Lea Wodach, Paige Lowary, and Paige Parker.

Coach Gasso, obviously, high expectations for this team every year. After your opening loss to Washington, you indicated that you guys would play like champions throughout the rest of the tournament, and I think you did. How proud are you of this team for doing that?

PATTY GASSO: Off the charts proud. I definitely would always do this, whether we win or lose, we give God the glory. We've been on a path, loved the challenge, proud of these guys. It's a great senior group. Gave it all we had. That's all I can ask for.

Q. You guys have been one of the greatest offensive teams in college softball, but it just didn't fire in the Women's College World Series. Can you put your finger on it? Is it just one of those things about softball, or what do you think?

PATTY GASSO: It's great pitching that we're facing. Every pitcher here, every team here has to have at least two superstar pitchers, and if you don't have that, you're probably not going to last very long.

I think Washington is an outstanding team, and they beat us twice, flat out beat us. They earned everything that they got. No doubt, no doubt. We just couldn't get our legs into things.

But they're making great plays. Every time we got an opportunity, the right fielder is just killing us. She was exceptional. So, again, the fight this team had to go through yesterday and the heat and get up and really -- I mean, we believed we could do this, and if you don't believe, you won't.

They had their minds set that they were going to play on Monday, and I appreciate that. That's why I love this team. That's why it hurts, because two years straight we have not had to feel this, in a great way, but a weird way, an odd feeling to sit up here and feel emotional, because our emotions were off the charts, oh, my gosh, we just did this.

So, if you can just kind of grasp the eliteness of this group to say, wow, we're in the final four, but it just isn't good enough because we've been there two years, that is something that's indescribable this group. I don't know any other groups that have felt this. So it's been a great ride.

Q. Now you have a chance to look back at it, can you put in perspective what Paige Parker has done throughout her career and especially in this venue?

PATTY GASSO: Okay, I've said this before, and she'll probably hear this and blow my phone up, but Keilani Ricketts would disagree, and I love her to death, and she's been outstanding. But to be honest right now Paige Parker is the best pitcher in Oklahoma history, and that is because she has won not only two National Championships, but she has thrown back to -- she's done some unbelievable things. So has Keilani, no doubt about it.

But when people recognize pitchers in this game, they recognize the strikeouts and they don't recognize so much the craftiness and the will and the guts, and what Paige Parker did yesterday was something I don't know that you'll see again.

Just like I said this when she was a sophomore, I don't know that you'll ever see someone pitch every inning of every game and get every win at a College World Series the way she did in the championship her sophomore year.

She's one of the best this sport has ever seen, and people should understand that. I do.

Q. For the four seniors, if you won a pair of National Championships, obviously this is not the way you wanted it to end, but can you all talk about the journey that you guys have had together and how special it's been?

NICOLE PENDLEY: Yeah, I've been pretty blessed to meet all of these people and go through the experiences, so I wouldn't trade anything for the world. I take everything as a learning experience. We won two National Championships, we have a ton to be grateful for. Just taking this season and be able to learn from it and use it for life later on is something I'll cherish.

LEA WODACH: Yeah, I'm thankful that Coach -- I'm thankful that Coach gave us an opportunity. We just came in as young freshmen with big eyes playing with Lauren and Shelby and some of the biggest names softball has ever heard, and just learning from them and growing together and accomplishing so much on the field, but so much more off the field. The life lessons I've learned and the growth we've all had as sisters and with Coach and just as a family, believing in each other and learning all these lessons that go far, far beyond anything we've ever accomplished on the field.

So, yeah, two National Championships is great, but in reality, ten years from now no one's ever going to remember, and we all know that. Just valuing the experiences and everything we've learned and just being thankful for the opportunity and the platform we've had for four years.

PAIGE LOWARY: I'm just really thankful that Coach gave me a shot a couple years ago. I was in a really bad place, and this place has just really changed my life. I can't really put it into words how much my life has changed in two years, but I'm just really sad it's over.

PAIGE PARKER: I am just so thankful to have been a part of this program for the past four years. I've met lifelong friends. I've created relationships with people that will never be broken, and I've just had so much fun and I've been so blessed to have been coached by Coach Gasso and Coach Lombardi and JT. I'm just so blessed that they took a chance on me and have had confidence in me and believed in me.

I'm just so thankful that I've had the experiences that I've had and had the best teammates anyone could ever ask for.

Q. The way you guys played, you didn't play as well

as you wanted to this week, still made the final four. Does that in a way show how tough it is and how monumental it is to have done what you did the previous two years, just how tough it is to win when you get here?

LEA WODACH: Absolutely. I mean, we can walk away saying, like our Coach said, Washington beat us fair and square twice. They took it to us and played better than we did. There is not much to say about that. But just everything's got to go your way. You've got to have good defense, you've got to have good pitching. You've got to be hitting well. You've got to have clutch hits. You've got to have clutch plays on the defense, and everything's got to fall your way. You've got to get the calls to go your way.

That's just the little things like that that a lot of people don't realize. Everything has to go your way.

It didn't fall for us, and we also weren't playing our best. We're not at our best right now, and that's what sucks is we're walking away -- we lost, but we know we're better than that. That's not to take away anything Washington's done, but I don't think we played our best today, and we didn't play our best on Thursday. We just didn't hit the ball well. But I absolutely think everything -- a lot of things have to go your way, and it is tough to win. It's really hard to win one. It's hard to win two. And it's really hard to three-peat. So there's a reason why it's only been done once.

Q. For all the players, can you just talk about the journey that you've been on and the team has been on from the first time you came to camp to here? Just what has really stood out about this squad overall?

JOCELYN ALO: It's been an amazing journey, and I wouldn't trade it for the world. All the fitness tests, all the triathlons, everything.

STUDENT-ATHLETE: What are you talking about? You have three more, dude.

JOCELYN ALO: I know. (Laughing). It's been an awesome ride with these seniors and I'm really going to miss them a lot.

NICOLE PENDLEY: Coming in as freshmen, we all have big eyes and a lot of shoes to fill. We came in with a great senior class as freshmen, and I think we learned a lot from that.

So the biggest thing is the learning experience. We look back as freshmen and we were little babies, I guess, and we've changed so much. It's cool to see all my close friends grow.

Yeah, we didn't do what we wanted to do, but we have set a standard for the future and how things are supposed to be. It's just cool to see the impact we have on other people.

LEA WODACH: Yeah, it's kind of a lot of what Nicole said. It's cool to know that Coach will tell you, we just come in as girls and we leave as women, and that's the truth. There's no doubt about that. We've all grown so much. Just everything is so much more than softball here. They prepare it, and they show it, and all their actions are all about that. All the coaches, Coach Lombardi, Coach Gasso, JT, they're all incredible leaders that want so much for us beyond the field.

And that's something that I'll remember, and that's the journey I'll remember for the rest of my life.

PAIGE LOWARY: I transferred here two years ago. And like I mentioned, I was in a really bad place, and everyone here just really opened their arms to me and made me feel safe and welcome. Learned how to trust again. I mean, this place is just super genuine, and nothing is bull crap, like everything they say is what they mean, and everyone grows here and becomes women.

PAIGE PARKER: Yeah, pretty much what all of these guys said. All of our coaches care more about us as people than as softball players, and that shows. We've all made huge, huge strides as people while we've been in this program. It's amazing to see how much we've all grown up over these past four years. You know, the amazing women that we all have turned into.

Q. Patty, you used both Paiges on the mound today. Can you take us through how you decided to start Paige Lowary, and when you knew it was time to put Paige Parker back in the game?

PATTY GASSO: Paige Lowary was wanting a little bit more opportunity against Washington. For some reason we just weren't making plays the way we needed to. So it's more of a -- she was a little bit behind in counts at times, so it was more just a change momentum-type situation. Nothing that she did horribly wrong or anything. It's just feel of the game and trying something different.

Q. Jocelyn, I'm curious, you seem to have a great awareness of what's going on around you. You come in on the tail end of one of the greatest senior classes in softball history. What will you take from that going forward?

JOCELYN ALO: I'm just going to take everything that they have taught me from on and off the field, and we're going to come back stronger next year, for sure, no doubt.

Q. We saw you show a different kind of emotion after last year's championship series a year ago. And then prior to the start of this season, you talked about how calm this group had you from preseason workouts. Now it's a different kind of emotion. Can you just talk us through the journey this team has taken you through this season?

PATTY GASSO: This is painful what you guys are doing right now (laughing).

What they did that was so outstanding is that they learned. They learned from their mistakes. So the year before we won the National Championship, but along the way we didn't have a good fall, and they knew that. So they wanted to have a good fall, and they did. They knew we had some rough patches in the middle of the season that almost completely took us down, and they made sure that that didn't happen.

They knew that being a team was a team, although every team -- I don't care what anyone says, when you have 21 women, they're not all best friends. So there is a clique here and a clique there. But when we come on the field, we have to come as one. And this clique has to get along with this clique and all of this stuff.

So I remember them having like a hash it out kind of in the classroom, yelling at each other a little bit, but that's what women do. That's what women do. Girls will pretend it's not happening or back fight each other. These guys faced it, and that is one of the things I think I'm most proud of is watching them do that. Because when they did that, a lot of things changed.

What I love about these seniors is, and I'm so proud, they're going to be great coaches. I've got six seniors, and I think every one of them -- I don't know about Lowary, I don't know what's up with her over there. She's going to be playing for a while. But this one's going to coach, that one's going to coach. That one's going to coach. Kelsey Arnold is going to coach, and Hannah Sparks is going to coach. That's a coach's dream to see your players do that. That journey means they're listening, and they see what we're doing and they want to do it. It's awesome.

Q. Obviously Sydney Romero had a great season, but she didn't have it in the way you wanted to. Is there anything you talked with her throughout the NCAA tournament on, and is there anything you wish she would have focused on a little bit more?

PATTY GASSO: You know, Syd's got such a big heart, and like they all say, they love this team. She wants to be the leadoff. She almost was pressing a little bit too much. You could see that. I wouldn't take her out of the leadoff because she's been it all year. Just felt like

she would get through it, and she worked, she tried.
Sometimes that happens.

I think some great players get to a big -- look at what
she's done in the last two years. She's been our hero.
I think she knew that. Maybe she pressed a little bit for
it, but she's an All-American, and rightly so. We
wouldn't be here without her.