

June 2, 2014



Florida: 5
Alabama: 0

Interview with:

Florida

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida Head Coach Tim Walton, Lauren Haeger, Kirsti Merritt, Aubree Munro, Hannah Rogers, and Kelsey Stewart. We will start with a statement from Coach Walton.

COACH WALTON: I thought today was a great game, great crowd; nice to see everybody out there. This is our first win in a game in a Championship Series so it means a lot to get up here and make a great game out of the first game and make this a great series. Just proud of the way Hannah, obviously, starting off for us and doing a great job. And the defense; I can't say enough about how well our defense has been playing; just proud of the way they're taking leadership out there and doing a lot of nice things. And the clutch hit; Aubree stepping up and getting us on the board. Getting that first hit is the key to a lot of games. I know most people think it sounds easy, but getting that hit and not getting no-hit is awesome. And to break up the no-hitter and the shutout and all the other stuff with it was huge. I thought she really had a really nice swing on a pitch that she could drive. I thought a lot of our hitters did. We struck out a few times, but overall I thought we stayed pretty true to the game plan.

Q. As good as Hannah has been all four years, what is happening now that has kind of allowed her to take this to the next level all through the postseason?

COACH WALTON: Well, I think I said it the other day; I think her stuff is just so much better. I think her pitches have a lot better break, her location is really sharp, the off-speed pitches are key. We've been talking about that, probably about the three-quarter point in the season. That's been the turning point for her, when she has been

able to locate an off speed pitch she hasn't had in three-quarters of her career before that. To me that's the turning point. It makes all her other pitches look a little bit harder and have a little bit more explosive bite at the end. Again, I think a lot of it has to do with the experience she has gained throughout her career and she is obviously pitching lights out for us right now.

Q. Hannah, you were perfect through four. I don't know if you realized that, were aware of it, I don't know if there was any excitement around that. Were you aware of it? I know you're trying to win a championship, but does that add something to what's going on?

HANNAH ROGERS: No, I wasn't really aware of it. I kept using my defense and I try to not to look up at the scoreboard too much, unless I'm looking at the count; just trust every pitch that I throw.

Q. Aubree, to expand on his question, how important is it to the draw first blood that way?

AUBREE MUNRO: It's huge, especially against a team like Alabama who has been playing great this tournament. Just being able to get on the board first kind of adds a little bit of pressure and helps us breathe easier and helps Hannah go out there and throw without any issues.

Q. What did you see on that pitch and what do you see from her?

AUBREE MUNRO: With Hannah?

Q. Yes.

AUBREE MUNRO: Unbelievable. She's lights out. That's all I can say. I can say it over and over again – she's lights out. She is on a mission and it's honestly guiding our whole team right now.

Q. For the batters, was Traina -- I know you guys struggled against her earlier in the season. What was different tonight? What were you able to do?

AUBREE MUNRO: I think our game plan was to keep it simple and a lot of us went to a slap that helps us keep our swings simple and a little bit smaller, so being able to see the ball and be aggressive with some good pitches.

KIRSTI MERRITT: We have been preparing more, we made more adjustments than we did last time. Last time we didn't make any adjustments, but when we came up there around the second and third time, we made our adjustments, got up a little bit more on the plate and we hit it.

Q. Lauren, can you talk about breaking out of what has been definitely a slump lately and Tim can you talk about that?

LAUREN HAEGER: These past couple games have been a struggle for me. I don't know why, but it happens to all hitters and for me it just happens to happen at the World Series. It's a thing. But I'm trying to go up there and keep it simple. My team believes in me, and no matter what I have the greatest support system ever. Hannah is doing a great job and I want to have her back and do the little things. If it's not a home run, it's not a home run; but it's a base hit up the middle or a walk. It's doing the little things and staying positive and trusting the process.

COACH WALTON: I think for Lauren I don't feel it as a slump, because she's getting on base, she's still doing little things, turning line ups over. I know we don't run a traditional offense that relies on one hitter. We have really put the emphasis on the on-base percentage and when we have one hitter that's not getting hits, or getting on base, it still gives more opportunities for hitters, opportunities to get more at-bats. I didn't look at it as a struggle. One hit, yeah, but she's been on base four or five times since she's been here. But she recognized the anticipation and what she felt and got up this morning at 8:30 and we went and hit. I think that's the only way you can get better, is if you work yourself out of it. I think that's the key for all our hitters. We're going to work. We didn't come out here to hang out and eat funnel cakes. We came out here to win and then eat funnel cakes.

Q. Aubree, I guess you're not necessarily a huge power hitter, so what's it feel like for that power to come at such a big time?

AUBREE MUNRO: It's pretty exciting.

I was honestly just going in there -- this year has really been important for me as far as simplifying everything. I haven't been trying to hit home runs, I've been trying to make good contact, get the ball through the infield and things like that. I just saw a good pitch today and was able to drive it out.

Q. You got that rally going with the 2-out bunt single and got things going, you gave her some insurance, had her back, like you guys talk about, can you speak about that?

KELSEY STEWART: I always say as the lead-off batter that's my job to get on base, but I think throughout the first time through the lineup all the batters did a great job communicating what they were seeing and our adjustments. And if we didn't understand we were talking to Coach and he was helping us outside and making adjustments and definitely doing my job as a lead-off.

Q. Hannah, can you talk about the double plays? They get someone on and there is not much time for there to be -- that to put any pressure on you the way they were playing behind you.

HANNAH ROGERS: We weren't caught on that all season long, and the coaches, they work hard on that, too. When we're on at practice, we'll spend like 10, 15 minutes on just rolling double plays. I think that's what helps us get out of the innings quicker, too. I think that's why we work on it so much.

Q. Hannah, just the third time being out here you seem different. Obviously the result is different. What feels different for you out there?

HANNAH ROGERS: I think I'm just confident right now and trusting my pitches and not trying to overthink my pitches right now, too. Just throwing it, and if it's going to get (hit) hard, at least I was confident throwing it and trusting in my defense. Because if I can make a good pitch then I know in my head I'm going to get a ground ball or a pop-up to the outfield.

Q. Hannah, you've been throwing to Aubree for about two seasons. What does she bring to the partnership that has helped you over time?

HANNAH ROGERS: She is very vocal

and I think that helps me, sometimes too. She brings a lot of energy she always pumps me up, and she is always saying the right things to me just to keep me motivated and if I miss a spot she lets me know. She'll walk out halfway and let me know that I missed my spot and I think we work hard together. In the bullpen, we work on locations, too, and just hitting spots. She is always honest with me on every pitch.

Q. Hannah and Tim, you guys have never been this close, this program has never been as close as you are right now to winning the whole thing. What will tomorrow be like? What do you do differently? What do you do the same?

HANNAH ROGERS: I think keep everything the same, not trying to do anything too different. Maybe make adjustments here and there with maybe defense or hitting and just whatever Coach wants to do, we'll just trust him.

COACH WALTON: Yeah, I mean, we just talked about today just trying to make this be like every other series and every other game.

I think that's it is goal, just trying to do the same thing we've been doing -- pregame meals and the same time we get on the bus and go through the same process. Overall, you can tell by my voice that I'm not really very excited yet because there is really nothing to be excited about. We won one game. It's a race to two in this series and we get that "W" tomorrow you'll hear a different voice. But right now we've got to do a good job of doing our job and staying confident and make adjustments. They're going to make adjustments, they always do. We have to be ready to counter and do the things we're capable of.

Q. Tim, I have a question with the decision of McLean in the lineup and to keep her in for Castro and if you think she'll be in right field tomorrow.

COACH WALTON: She'll be in right field tomorrow probably about the 4th or 5th inning like we have been doing the past 12 games in a row. I have kinda gone to that combination. Bailey is in. As soon as we get the lead about the second time through the lineup, sometimes three depending on how Lauren's at-bats go, I put Jess in at left and move Bri to right field. It's just a feel, to be honest. I would like to have Bailey up in that first and second 2-out situation, but Justine has a roll on this team and right now she is playing great

defense; got top-10 play of the week last week to get us here and she does a good job. We need her to make contact and I want to change up their defense. I don't want them to have the same type of hitter coming up over and over again so I pick and choose our opportunities to put Justine in to run and then play defense.

Q. Tim and Hannah, when exactly did you go to the wristband thing and did it take a little time for the pitchers to be able to find a rhythm while looking at pitches like that or was there any change at all for you?

COACH WALTON: It was actually Hannah's idea to go to that wristband. We went to the wristband on the road on a road trip. We felt like we were getting picked, to be honest with you. We felt like we were getting picked and we just decided that we were going to go to that. She actually -- we'd done it before a little bit messing around with it, so it took a little getting used to, but I think the catcher -- I think everybody kinda likes it. Aubree sits over the middle of the plate anyway so it doesn't really change her game up, but now it's just routine. I know there are a lot of words out there about that.

Is it part of the game? The game has changed, technology has changed, cameras have changed and video has changed. So we made adjustments with the times as well.

HANNAH ROGERS: I think like Coach said, people were reading our signs and picking little things up that maybe we could take more control over. I just -- yeah, I think it was a great idea and it also helps me whenever I'm pitching to kind of focus on where I want to locate the pitch instead of just getting the pitch right when I'm stepping on the mound and having to make a decision right then and there where I want to locate it. Whereas if I get the sign I can figure out where the batter is standing and read their feet in the box.

Q. Tim, how important was the pitch count tonight? Hannah obviously low, where your hitters really worked Traina.

COACH WALTON: I mean, that's definitely a game plan. I thought the first couple innings we were swinging a little erratic and had some quick innings, but I think overall that is a game plan for us. We want to make her throw deep into the count and we want her to be able to make mistakes, but we're certainly going to be

aggressive. I talked to Holly after the game; we're patiently aggressive. You throw first-pitch strike, we're swinging. You throw a first-pitch ball we're going to take and do a good job of getting more pitches to be seen and make adjustments and get better.

Q. Kirsti and Kelsey first time up the top 3 ground outs off after that you guys tore it up. What changed the second and third time you started seeing her there at the top of the order?

KIRSTI MERRITT: Like I said earlier, we just made our adjustments. Also, whenever Stewart gets on it's kind of a -- it's kind of -- we get rolling and when she is on I know that we're going to score so it gives me confidence when I'm up to bat.

KELSEY STEWART: I felt like my first at-bat I was feeling her out and then I thought I did a good job of communicating with Coach of what I was seeing to help the other batters. Then when I got up to bat I was looking for one pitch because I knew she was going to throw it; because I think she threw it to me three times in my first at-bat. So I was just sitting on that one pitch and waiting for her to throw it, and then she threw it, and I bunted. When you get a bunt it opens my eyes so I can see the ball a lot better.

Q. Will you tell us what the pitch is?

KELSEY STEWART: No. Tomorrow, tomorrow!

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody

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