

June 3, 2014



Florida: 6
Alabama: 3

An interview with:

Florida

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida Head Coach Tim Walton, Kelsey Stewart, Stephanie Tofft, Hannah Rogers, Delanie Gourley and Lauren Haeger. We will begin with an opening statement from Coach Walton.

COACH WALTON: First of all, I just want to congratulate Alabama and their senior class on obviously a wonderful season and wonderful career for some. This is kind of a surreal moment for me right now sitting up here with Hannah and all the other kids that bought into it this year. Did a really good job. We had a really good off-season, felt really good and we just felt good about our team. We set a goal and most teams set goals to win every series or win the SEC or do some things, and this team actually set a goal to win a national championship. It's the first one we've ever talked about in my coaching. In 2009, talked about the ability to come out and be No. 1 with a target on our back, but this team felt like we had the parts and the pieces to do it. So very proud. Kinda gutsy and kinda bold, but just give them the credit. I think they did a great job of doing their part and taking the responsibility to be a good teammate, a good friend and a good player. But I want to give a hats off to all our players and staff. Hats off to Lindsey Spatola, one of our players who didn't play with us at the College World Series, for throwing BP for us, throwing bunts. You need those role players, those kids that get it, and just-- just extremely excited for that.

Just want to thank the ASA and the NCAA and the Hall of Fame, and just what a wonderful tournament. The crowd was great and the fans were great. And I know this is going to sound a

little easy to do, but I thought the umpiring crew was awesome this year. And I know they take a lot of criticism for calls and strikes and balls and whatever. But, honestly, the umpiring was just part of the game. They weren't the game and I want to tip my hats to the umpires for keeping things fair all across the board. Thanks for the coverage that the media has given us and making softball a big deal. And thank you to Jeremy Foley for hiring me nine years ago and giving me a chance.

Q. What was your thought process for starting Lauren and what did you tell both Lauren and Hannah last night?

COACH WALTON: I told Lauren last night and talked to Hannah today. And I don't know the statistics, but anytime we've gone with a Hannah Rogers "W" and gone back the next day with her, we've lost every time that I can remember with Hannah pitching. We went into this three-game series knowing that, and we had Lauren to pitch today, no matter win or lose yesterday, so we stuck with it.

I honestly didn't sleep very well last night; not that I don't have trust and faith in Lauren and Delanie. But Hannah was on fire and to take her out of this game, I know it was gutsy and bold. But we've talked all year long. We don't have a superstar on our team. We have a bunch of players that do their job, and today was a tribute to that. We got a Lauren "quality" start, Delanie gets the "W" and Hannah gets the save. Each one of them had a complete game shutout in the regionals, and for all of them to be a part of this national championship game was something very, very special, and I'm very proud of them.

Q. I was going to get Lauren's take and Delanie's take on the pitching decision, especially you, Delanie, not having pitched since the "FAMU" game, to come in with such a pressure-packed situation. And start with Lauren.

LAUREN HAEGER: When Coach Walton told me I was going to start, I was excited. It's a

three-game series, and that's how we've been doing it all year. Hannah has been doing great, and I told my team and told Hannah, I'm going to go as long and as hard as I can, and I knew I had two pitchers behind me that were going to shut everyone down, too.

And for them to give me insurance when I gave up a run in the bottom of the first was really great. And when Coach told me that, it was a great feeling, and it made me feel like he could trust me, and that we really had a chance to win.

DELANIE GOURLEY: Yeah, Hannah has been on fire all week. Lauren had a really great start tonight and, you know, they just -- they kept us prepared. All week they said be ready to go in at any time. We had really good bullpens and this is what it comes down to. Us pitchers, we work as a family, and tonight we proved it, that we really work well together.

Q. Hannah, you were named the Most Outstanding Player. Could you give us your reaction and what it means to you to be part of the first Florida Gators national championship team?

HANNAH ROGERS: It was very exciting when I heard my name and how excited my teammates were for me, and I couldn't have done it without the defense behind me. And the offense, they did this week, and all the hard work we put in throughout this season. What was the second question?

Q. Being part of the first national championship team.

HANNAH ROGERS: Very exciting, just to do it for Coach and all the hard work he's put in all of the four years I've been here, and trusting him all four years and my teammates and doing it with these girls. It's just a great feeling.

Q. Hannah, how did you feel about the decision that Tim made?

HANNAH ROGERS: I was trusting him, and I've always trusted Coach. I knew he was making the right decision, and I knew that Lauren was going to shut 'em down, and I knew that Delanie was going to come in and shut 'em down. I was excited to see everyone play well tonight.

Q. Lauren, to get the four runs in the second, how key was that in terms of taking the pressure off?

LAUREN HAEGER: You go into a big game like that, obviously you feel pressure and for the offense to contribute four runs in the inning was great, a breath of fresh air; gives you a little breathing room. And I knew I could let my defense work and keep making my pitches, and I knew we would make plays, and they did that.

Q. Coach, this was Jaclyn Traina's shortest start of the year. What did you guys figure out?

COACH WALTON: Well, you know, we've seen her a lot and I think that was beneficial to us. It's kind of the same thing. I know it may not have been the most popular decision among people, wondering why Hannah didn't start, but the reason we didn't start Hannah was for the reason they did start Jackie. We got a bunch of runs off her after we faced her yesterday, and that could have been the same result if we started Hannah. I truly believe that. Back-to-back days against teams that use video and have smart coaches -- they're going to make adjustments. And they've got good hitters over there, and that's ultimately what we decided; to give them credit and respect and we changed it up.

I thought Jackie was good. She was trying to throw her rise ball a little bit more today and trying to throw her off-speed pitch a little more. The last rise ball she threw was the one Steph put over the fence. But that was the game plan we went with and we knew she was going to have to make adjustments. She tried to throw off-speed drop, and I thought we did a good job of being disciplined.

Q. Lauren, I was down on the field right after the game, and you seemed emotional. Pretty raw for you. I don't know if that's your personality, were you feeling a little extra pressure with the start today? I know you pitch all the time, but you can say it's just another game, but it's not just another game. Can you share with us what you were going through? You're still kind of teary-eyed now, in a good way, but give us a sense of your emotion.

LAUREN HAEGER: I am a real emotional person, but I wouldn't have rather come out and do this with another group of girls. And it feels so surreal that we could make history and make this happen for our program and our school and for each other and for Hannah and Steph. And all our

hard work flashed through my brain, and setting a goal of winning a national championship, and it actually coming true. We had our lows in our season, and we lost the grip on that goal, but it all worked out. I was just -- I was so emotional because I never in my life ever thought I would be a national champion, and I'm sure all these girls feel the same way. It warms my heart to know that all of our hard work paid off.

Q. Kelsey and Stephanie, being able to hit Jackie like you guys did, but one point in the fourth inning you guys were hitting .390, 2 outs, clutch hitting against a good pitcher. If you could speak to that?

STEPHANIE TOFFT: I mean, just sticking to the plan of swinging at good pitches and Coach has been working with us a lot with our swings and everything like that. She is a great pitcher, so all of us knew that we were going to have to be very disciplined at the plate and make sure if we were going to swing, we put a good swing on the ball, and it worked out with us. And I think we did really well under the pressure with 2 outs. We were motivated, it being a big situation like it was, to put the ball in play and make something happen.

KELSEY STEWART: I agree with Steph. We made our adjustments and did our thing, but I give it to my team, we never quit until there are 3 outs in the inning. We never give up. Making good contact, keeping each other up, like, hey, that was great contact, you're fine, so I think having each other's back and always working with 2 outs, I guess.

Q. When you would watch the World Series on TV. How far did those games seem from your softball reality?

STEPHANIE TOFFT: Not even close to being possible. I never thought in a million years I would end up at Florida, let alone in a National Championship Series, and getting to end our last game on a win is just an amazing feeling, and it's so -- I don't think it's hit me yet, that we just won. I would not want to be with any other group of girls, any other coaching staff. I love our fans, everything. I loved this entire experience.

Q. Coach, following up to your comments earlier, toward the end there you mentioned Jeremy Foley. Seemed like that was emotional for you as well. I imagine maybe you're getting a little reflection on your career, the nine years. If you could put in context for

us the journey. Florida is about winning championships. You've got Olympians all over the place, and now your program is part of that.

COACH WALTON: When I actually sought after the job -- I had a good job at Wichita State -- but I realized, really, I think my word in my cover letter was my driving personality. I understand the pressure it takes to be a coach at Florida. We do have Olympians and we do win championships; it's expected. It's not something that I can really describe to you. A lot of people can't take that kind of pressure, and I felt like I could. And he gave us the resources. Everything I've asked for, Jeremy has been there for me. Everything I've asked for, Lynda Tealer has been there for me to help our players get what they need to be successful. And when I say take "a chance," I had only been coaching softball for seven years, six and a half years when he hired me. And he took a chance on somebody who had only been a head coach for three years.

So that's what I was talking about more than anything. I felt like I was a good fit, but for somebody to believe in that, I had a lot of other schools that didn't really think I was good enough, didn't have enough experience, and he did.

And just like when I recruited these girls, same thing. Florida didn't have a lot of experience, and they took a chance on me and our program. And Jeremy has given us the resources to be the best at everything; not only softball but academics and all the other stuff that goes into it, and I just really appreciate that for me and my family and our players and their families. They know they're going to be taken care of very well when they go to Florida. And they expect you to win and graduate.

Q. Being older than you are, Tim, and slower, I'm trying to focus on your three-game strategy for pitching. Had you planned to have Hannah come in for the last three innings or was that determined by the situation?

COACH WALTON: Well, if you -- ironically, if you look at the box score, how I made the substitution was probably the most interesting part of it. I had to make the substitution for Delanie Gourley to come in for Taylore Fuller in the DP position, so that handcuffed me a little bit, because Bailey hit a double down the line with no outs. We had the plan that if Delanie would come up with two outs, we would let her have her first college at-bat, and that's what we did. She had a helmet

on in the dugout, ready to go. But now you have a runner in scoring position with a three-run lead, and who doesn't want a four-run lead? So that's when I pulled Delanie and had Hannah hot and ready to go.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone.

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