

2015 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, June 3
Florida 4 - Michigan 1



Florida

An Interview with:
COACH TIM WALTON
LAUREN HAEGER
NICOLE DEWITT
TAYLOR SCHWARZ
KELSEY STEWART

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Florida head coach Tim Walton, student-athlete Lauren Haeger, student-athlete Nicole DeWitt, student-athlete Kelsey Stewart and coming soon will be student-athlete Taylor Schwarz. Coach, general comments about the game.

COACH WALTON: Before I start with the game, just want to congratulate Michigan on a phenomenal season to have two teams coming down at the end with almost identical records. And to win this game to be the overall winning percentage, leader in the country, just says a lot about not only both programs but the coaching staffs and the players. And also want to thank the NCAA for hosting this event. Thought it was one of the best events that -- obviously it's easy to sit up here and say that. But just a great event. All the amenities they've added and taking care of the grounds crew and get everything right and the ESPN and the viewership and viewers and fans, I heard it was the biggest event watched last year. And the number, 74,000 or 77,000 that came through the gates, just we couldn't have what we have without that, and that support. So thanks to everybody for being there and supporting these kids. And just -- I'll make it simple. I thought we really committed to -- we really owned making an adjustment at the plate. And I think last night my words probably are still ringing in some of their heads. But overall the adjustment we made, and again our pitching staff, just so proud of our pitching staff. Without Aleshia Ocasio and Delanie Gourley on Monday night, we wouldn't be sitting up here. I'm pretty sure of it. And Lauren (Haeger), can't say enough about her season, what she's meant in the circle, at the plate, and in the locker room. And the confidence and work ethic she brought this year has been tremendous. And being rewarded with Player of the Year but also with the national championship trophy to go with that and a ring and SEC championship. Proud of our players and thankful that I'm their coach and they buy into what we do. A lot of confidence.

Q. Kelsey, in the first inning you took what looked like a really painful hit on your knee. You were able to get to second on the attempted fielder's choice. You scored the first run. How much pain were you in. And can you take us through what that was like?

KELSEY STEWART: I think any time you get hit in the kneecap, it's going to cause a lot of pain. It hit me in the right spot. I had to work through it. Once I saw Nicole (DeWitt) lay the bunt down, I saw their third baseman try to throw me out. And there was no way that was happening today. And Lauren (Haeger), clutch, like she always does. And that first one, whoever scored the first run of these past three games has won the game. So I thought that was a big upfiting for us.

Q. Tim and Lauren, you mentioned the adjustments. Can you be any more specific on what adjustments those might have been?

COACH WALTON: We really were having problems getting extension. Couldn't get any extension. And I couldn't get any clearer definition of why we couldn't get extension. If it was velocity or if it was movement. And so we -- if you notice a lot of the hitters, they're choked up probably four, five inches on the bat. And I gave an interesting analogy I think today that one of the greatest home run hitters of all time, Barry Bonds, 32-inch bat, chokes up two to three inches. And he can hit just fine. Let's just go find a way to make contact and hit hard ground balls today. Our jam shots were going to the catcher and pitcher the last couple of days; finally got over the shortstop's head and made that adjustment.

LAUREN HAEGER: Yeah, he said it all. That's exactly what we did. I don't know.

Q. What was your day like yesterday? You sat on the podium, you and Taylore (Fuller) said you were coming with different energy. And you scored three runs in the first inning. Different energy. What was the day like? Did you get rid of yesterday mentally and just kind of focus on what was ahead?

LAUREN HAEGER: Yes, we used it as motivation. We realized this isn't going to be handed to us and we really needed to work hard. Michigan is a great team. And they are a great team. And we just had a different

attitude today. You could see it in our eyes. You could see it in each other, you could hear it in our conversations. We were a different team. We were who we are today. And I couldn't be more proud of my teammates.

Q. Lauren and Taylor, can you talk about your emotions when you saw the weak grounder going to first? And for Lauren, can you talk about, did you think you were going to die underneath that dog pile?

LAUREN HAEGER: Yeah, my leg was not in the right position. Just kept getting heavier and heavier and I was like get off of me! But it was great. I tried to hold it out as long as I could. But when I saw that ground ball go to Taylor (Schwarz) I was, like, I froze. And I was, like, oh my gosh, this is going to happen. Oh my gosh. And Taylor sits on the base. I looked at Aubree (Munro), she threw her glove in the air. And I threw my glove in the air. I've never been in that position before. I've never been in the circle when that happened. I was, like, great, here comes the dog pile. It was a crazy feeling. It was very slow motion for me. And it was just an amazing feeling that I will feel forever.

TAYLOR SCHWARZ: Same thing, it's crazy how last year I made the last out. And this year I made the last out. I was really trying to soak it in, because I remember last year went by so fast. I saw that ball coming to me, I was like get the ball. Tag the base. Now you can throw your glove and the ball in the air. So much fun. And I got up out of the dog pile with dirt all over my face but it was so worth it.

Q. Coach, I know you never forget your first, but does it feel any sweeter the second time around?

COACH WALTON: Yeah, it was a little bit more emotional than the first. It was kind of an interesting thing. I don't know if it was a relief. I mean, everybody had said how many times you've been here before and not won it last year. I guess I never even thought of it that way. Last year it was just a lot of, just a lot of celebration. This time was a little bit different emotion. And I'm proud of watching these athletes just go out and continue to compete. And I got a bunch of competitors on our team. And I'm proud of just the way they went out and competed and really just raised that trophy up the way we did. And the way we run our program and the way the players play in our program with a lot of class, a lot of positive energy for kids out there. I'm really proud of them.

Q. Lauren, the last game in your career, how do you want Gator fans to remember your legacy?

LAUREN HAEGER: I mean, I just want everyone to know me as a person more than a softball player. And that when you work hard, good things happen for you.

When you really buy into something -- I bought into what Coach Walton does and did. And it worked out. And just, I just am so thankful to be a Gator and it's been a great time.

Q. Coach, the message at the beginning of the season was to let last year's team be last year's team. And throughout the course of the year how well did they do at that task of making their own memories and making their own moments?

COACH WALTON: I think the keyword you used there is their own moments. We had some ups and downs this season personally for some individuals on our team. One down at the end of the podium, Taylor Schwarz. Kid who has played every game her first couple years. This year kind of platooned a little bit. I'm proud of them. They all understand. I think the key to this creating your own moment is we've got 20 players on our team and each one has a role and each one brings value to the team. And if you can put yourself aside, your own selfish instincts, you want to play every game and support your teammates, good things happen for you. And I think that's the key. That's one of the things we worked on so hard. A good friend of ours, now all of ours, Brett Ledbetter what he did for us and helped us learn about the character components. Winning and losing kind of comes and goes but you as a person is never going to go anywhere. And the foundation of what we built here is so important to me. Again, I think that the kids on this podium really are good examples of that. Taylor Schwarz is none better having to watch somebody else play for a while. And I felt like we had a good matchup. I felt she matched up best with Haylie Wagner, and there she was with the biggest hit of our season, that's for sure.

Q. Lauren, can you talk about scoring from second there in the first, just talk me through that and then, Tim, a follow-up. As Lauren was talking about her legacy, is there a word or two that come to mind for you when you think about her mark on this program after four years?

LAUREN HAEGER: Well, when Taylor (Schwarz) hit the ball, I was just like there's two outs and I was putting my head down and trying to run as fast as I can. I'm not the fastest but coach is waving me around. And I was like, here it comes. Am I going to have to head first slide or slide by. I was like, oh my gosh. I ran as fast as I could. I could see her giving me part of the plate and I tried to slide in. I was trying to run as fast as I could.

COACH WALTON: One of the biggest things that I'll say: Lauren (Haeger) left her mark. What stands in mind is what her dad said to me in the recruiting process, is that Lauren is always everyone's favorite

player on the team, not because she hits home runs or strikes everybody out, but because of her personality. She came to us speaking five or six different languages and none of which any of us understand. They're not written languages. They're all languages amongst her teammates, and all of her teams. And everybody from Team U.S.A. to her high school team to her travel ball team, to now her college team and soon to be her pro team, she's always the most likable person on the team. She's fun-loving. She just has fun. And doesn't really take anything too serious. But the mark that she's going to leave on our program, once she graduates next year, she'll have a big sign like all the rest of the greatest Gators in the program's history because that's what she is. She's one of the greatest Gators that ever played and put the uniform on. We talked about the person. We talked about the player. We talked about the student side of things. And she's really bought into us. And I think I'm proud of her for all she's accomplished. But I'm more proud of her about how she's going to move on and be a great human being and she'll have a special part in my family, because my family loves her and loves what she's done. And I think the easiest thing to say she's one of the greatest players to ever play the game for the University of Florida Gators.

Q. Tim, have you ever been part of a game where there were so many batters hit by pitches?

COACH WALTON: I think the last time was probably Michigan. The last time we played them. I love Coach Hutch (Hutchins). I love her. I told her before the game, before the first game, it's a privilege to play on the field with her and her team and what she does at Michigan. They play with a lot of class. None of those were intentional, did I see. Nobody was complaining. They weren't complaining we were getting hit, I wasn't complaining when they were getting hit. Two teams trying to find a way to take away somebody's best pitch. I don't think anything -- there were a couple maybe a little close. But, hey, I've said it all year long, if somebody wants to stand and take a dose, I'm all for it. And she's all for it. I hear her at third -- she's smiling and pumping her fist. Again, I think that's part of the game. And it didn't change the outcome of the game fortunately. But I don't think I've been a part of that many like that, that's for sure.

Q. Kelsey and Taylor, you had the two big hits today. Can you just speak to what Tim was talking about, just the mentality or the change up of the approach going up to bat against Wagner this time?

TAYLOR SCHWARZ: I think earlier today at early hitting we bought into what Coach Walton was saying, making the right adjustments off (Haylie) Wagner. She's a great pitcher. We knew she was going to come

out hot and we had to make adjustments. Honestly, my at-bat I wasn't thinking about anything. I was just trying to get the barrel on the ball and it fell in the right spot. If it wasn't for Coach making those adjustments and really buying into it and believing in the process all year I don't think we would have had the result we had today.

KELSEY STEWART: We worked this morning on getting on the plate and really looking for my pitch. And I was looking for an inside pitch and if she was there to come inside she got a little too close to me and hit me. But that last pitch I was trying to hit it up the middle because the middle's wide open and that's my strength. And it just happened that I got a good piece of it.

Q. Tim, with both Lauren and Hannah Rogers last season we saw seniors reach a fork in the road and choose a certain path. Why and how did that happen two years in a row?

COACH WALTON: I think both -- if I can look at the physical attributes, I think both of them developed a good offspeed pitch late in their career. I think that's key. Hannah developed her offspeed pitch last year about three-quarters through the season. And Lauren decided to get hers about January, late January, maybe early February. Those have been the two physical attributes that I can say. Then I go to the mental side of things that obviously pushes them physically. They just worked really hard with Coach (Jennifer) Rocha and being able to get into the bullpen and work what they're good at and know the opponent. I think overall their work ethic, Hannah had a strong work ethic the whole time she was here just because she was pretty much our go-to pitcher a long time. Lauren kind of picked and chose her moments. She understood I'm not going to go in there exhaust myself for 45 minutes in the bullpen when I'm not going to get the ball on Friday night. Hannah has proven to be that. I think she bought in, changed her work ethic in the circle, in the bullpen more, I won't say probably the whole year, but probably from about November on she really kind of bought into I had a chance to pitch and pitch a lot this year.

Q. Lauren, considering this is your last game, obviously you'll take the result, but were you frustrated that you only got to really bat once?

LAUREN HAEGER: Not at all. Coach Ron (Walton)'s always told me to take your walks. I'll take my walks. I was having a really great tournament. I was seeing the ball really well. And we would have done the exact same thing, to whoever was hitting as well as I was on that side, too. No, I'm very proud of the way I hit.

Q. Nicole, I assumed you watch last year's national championship team from your couch, and now

you're at the podium here in Oklahoma City. How does it feel to be part of a championship team?

NICOLE DEWITT: It's a great feeling. I don't think it's quite hit me yet that I'm actually a national champion. But I know that it's happened. I'm just so proud of my team and I'm just so happy to actually experience this with these girls and I just, I don't know, I can't believe that it's happened. I've grown up looking forward to this moment and now it's here.

Q. Coach, she's not at the podium but expand on how big Katie (Kathlyn) Medina has been for this team?

COACH WALTON: Yeah, it's funny when you go through yesterday, I brought some socks and some extra shoes because they always get wet in big moments. Today I was like forget this I'm not bringing anything extra. I had it in the back of my mind, I really was hoping that whoever selected the all tournament team would recognize one of our most valuable players on our team, not only defensively but what she brings leadership wise and personality wise. Katie (Kathlyn) Medina is -- Lauren Haeger gets all the recognition, but Katie Medina is one of the best short stops in the country on one of the best teams in the country. She should be recognized in the all-tournament team in my mind.

Q. Taylor, I had a chance to visit with your mom and your sister yesterday. With your brother also being a star player for the baseball team, and I was just wondering if you could reflect on how valuable it's been with him being there at school with you, especially as Coach mentioned your role, more of a role player this year, and just kind of how that's been a special year. I know you're going to be helping out ESPN in a couple of weeks in Omaha, is that correct?

TAYLOR SCHWARZ: Hopefully.

Q. Hopefully get to see him play there as well. Could you comment on your defensive ability how that developed over the years. You had some key defensive plays during this series?

TAYLOR SCHWARZ: I've grown up with my brother. I've grown up watching him and his work ethic and his love for the game. Definitely my dad is a huge part of that, because no matter what he was doing he took time to work with my brother and I. And just growing up with him and seeing his love for the game really inspired me. Like I said before, I mimicked his swing. That's why I hit righty, because that's what I was seeing when I was little. Having him come to the UF, that's like having another support system for there. He would throw me batting practice if I wasn't having a good weekend. He's having an amazing year. He deserves it because he's worked his butt off to get what he's

gotten so far, and I'm just so proud of him and I'm just lucky to be his sister.

Q. Your defense?

TAYLOR SCHWARZ: I don't know. I'm a lefty. Coach Walton tried to put me in the outfield and it was absolutely awful and embarrassing. Really what other place can I play in infield besides first base. I tried to master it. I love it. That's the thing I love, defense. I thrive off of it. That's what makes it so great.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.