

# College World Series: Baton Rouge Regional

Sunday, June 4, 2017

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**Paul Mainieri**

**Kramer Robertson**

**Zach Watson**

**Alex Lange**

LSU - 11, Southeastern Louisiana - 6

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mainieri, we'll ask you to get started with a few opening comments, and then we'll go to the players after you.

PAUL MAINIERI: Big win for the Tigers tonight. This game is always so pivotal. If you're fortunate enough to win the first game, that winners bracket game is the difference between having to win one more game or win three more games. That gives you a great advantage when you only have to win one more game, in how you manage your staff and so forth.

I thought our team really played outstanding tonight. After yesterday afternoon, I just thought that was such an aberration on defense and some of the other things. I thought tonight we came out and played a terrific ball game. We were also up against a really tough team.

Boy, that Southeastern Louisiana team, their coach Matt Riser, they know who they are, and they play to the tee. They played really, really well tonight offensively. They have three big home run hitters in the lineup. Two of them hit home runs. The rest of their lineup handles the bats, steals bases. They scored two runs on a squeeze play. We knew they had that play, and we can't defend it. They just played really well and put a lot of pressure on us.

I was just so proud of our guys because they answered the pressure. Every time Southeastern came in and scored or put some -- or the score was tied or they took the lead, our guys responded right back. It was a tremendous offensive day by our guys as well.

I think also Alex Lange deserves an awful lot of credit for this victory tonight. The first two innings is probably the hardest he's been hit in his career, and he ends up third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and gives us four shutout innings and gets us to our bullpen.



That's what Alex has done his whole career. Even the games where he hasn't had his greatest stuff, he finds a way to pitch deep into the game and give our team a chance to win. That's why Alex will always go down in history as one of the greatest pitchers in LSU baseball history.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go to Alex off of that. Alex, talk a little bit about the first two innings as opposed to the next four.

ALEX LANGE: I was really glad we won. It's a testament to the offense and how well they played. I think that everyone played phenomenal tonight. Honestly, the team picked me up tonight. That's what teammates do. Wasn't in command of the fastball today. Talked about it all year. It was terrible. On my breaking ball, I think I was 9 out of 28 on first pitch strikes, pitching behind. When you pitch from behind in the postseason, these teams can hit, and they did. They hit the ball.

At that time, it's five runs happened, and now you turn your attention to trying to save the pen as much as you can for the rest of the weekend. I was trying to gut it out and go as long as I could and go until Coach told me not to.

THE MODERATOR: Next up, shortstop Kramer Robertson. Kramer, 4 for 4 night. Talk about your night at the plate, please.

KRAMER ROBERTSON: Being in the leadoff spot, you just try to get things going. They came up in the first inning and got that run. So my job there is to try to work my way around the base and get our team going. Had some big at bats after that. I just saw the ball well and didn't try to do too much. Guys came up with big at bats to keep us going.

THE MODERATOR: Outfielder Zach Watson. What did you do tonight, 3 for 5, two home runs. Not a bad night.

ZACH WATSON: Just tried to hit the ball back up the middle, not trying to do too much. Like I said, don't play to your opponent and just do what you can do.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open questions for everyone.

**Q. This is for either Kramer or Zach. What is it about this team that seems like, whenever another team puts up a big inning or puts up a score, that you guys respond so well?**

KRAMER ROBERTSON: I think that's just what good teams do. When a team gets momentum, that's a hard thing to capture and a hard thing to stop them. When they start feeling good about themselves, being a veteran team, we're calm. We never panic, and we understand what we do well.

So when another team scores and gets some momentum, that's a key focus of ours is to try to stop it and at least respond with runs and at least stop the bleeding and try to get some response and get some life back in your dugout.

**Q. Kramer, last night 0 for 5, two errors. Tonight 4 for 4, no errors. Mental shift? Bad luck? Or just --**

KRAMER ROBERTSON: Baseball is just weird. You can go a few months without making an error and then get a few in a game. Try not to lose confidence. If I make an error, I don't lose confidence. It just happens.

So I came out here today with the same mindset, same focus, and ready to play, just like I did yesterday. That's never going to change. I knew that I was going to have to come out here against this Southeastern team and do my part and not be nervous. I came out here with the same mindset I've had for the last 62 games, 63, whatever it is now, and just tried to do my job.

**Q. Coach, Zach's been productive for you for the last month or so. His two-handed approach, a lot is made of that, is that a placebo thing where, if you believe it works, then it actually works? And where do you think he gets that wiry strength from?**

PAUL MAINIERI: Those are tough questions. No, I think most hitters hit better when both hands are on the bat actually. Zach is -- you know, I've told the story about Zach so many times, I sound like a broken record. This fall, when he came here, he was very raw as a baseball player. He was a freshman, first days on campus. He made a lot of mistakes and didn't really know how to play the game at this level.

But you could see him being a sponge for learning and getting better every day. You could always see the athleticism. I always said he was an electric athlete with that wiry strength and he has a quick bat and good throwing arm. I mean, he's really got a lot of tools. He just needed to get into the flow of the game and learn how to play it at this level.

I said that he wasn't going to start the season in the starting lineup, but I felt, if there was one player the on our team that at some point would be inserted in the lineup and would really spark our team, it would be Zach Watson. I think I was pretty prophetic on that. He's been a tremendous asset for our team. He's gotten a lot of big hits, big home runs, stole a big base tonight. Last week in Hoover, he must have made ten phenomenal catches that kept the other team from scoring.

He's getting better every day. By the time he's finished here, people in LSU baseball will be talking about Zach Watson for a long time.

**Q. For Kramer, it kind of looked like you were concerned that Zach might spontaneously combust as he came across the plate. Can you tell us what that was all about?**

KRAMER ROBERTSON: Was trying to cool him off. He's on fire a lot. Same reason Alex throws water in my face. I wanted to be able to do that same, kind of a spur of the moment thing.

Like Coach said, Zach's obviously been huge for us. He was 3 for 5 tonight with two home runs \*\*. Obviously, huge at bats.

Coach said he had a feeling about Zach Watson at the beginning. Honestly, I didn't know. He was a freshman. Coach saw something in him before anyone else did. To his credit, once Mike became our hitting coach, Zach really took off. He told him, it's okay to hit the ball. You don't have to hit the ball on the ground. Try to hit the ball with your speed and you're strong. Zach responded to him, and he's been huge for us obviously.

**Q. Alex, it seemed like early in the game, you were missing your spots in the zone and leaving them to hit it. Later in the game, what kind of turned it around there?**

ALEX LANGE: I don't really know. Just gut it out, make it happen. I mean, there's -- it wasn't like a big thing mechanically that changed or anything. The only kind of mindset I had was just place the contact and let's go deep in the game as you can go.

Missing spots or in the zone, they say solo homers and singles don't beat you, but when you give up several singles back to back to back and can't stop the bleeding, that's when it gets to you. Just have to make better pitches. Wasn't in command of the zone. Breaking ball wasn't great tonight. So you pitch with what you have and go as long as you can.

**Q. Zach, do you like these face baths that you get**

**after each home run?**

ZACH WATSON: Oh, yeah, it's awesome.

PAUL MAINIERI: That word was awesome.

ZACH WATSON: Yeah, awesome. Hopefully, we can keep them coming.

**Q. Paul, Kramer led off four different innings and reached every time tonight. How much does that set the tone, and how much is that a credit to his veteran leadership on this team bouncing back from yesterday?**

PAUL MAINIERI: I knew without a doubt that Kramer is going to play a great game today. He takes it really personal if he doesn't play well. Yesterday was a little bit of a struggle for him. He hasn't played like that very frequently in his career here. You could just see the determination in his face today. He came to the park ready to play, and I knew he was going to do some spectacular things.

We're very fortunate that he did lead off a lot of innings, and he got on base almost every -- or every time, I guess. When he gets on base to lead off an inning, we should score. I take it personal when we don't score. I made a couple of calls tonight that didn't work out very well and felt like I kind of ruined the inning for us a couple of times.

But Kramer made it happen. Last time he got on base, he kind of earned that run for us all by himself. That hustle off the catcher was an important run to get. Kramer just played great. That's what leaders do. That's what winners do. When they have a bad day, they bounce back, and they don't dwell on it.

**Q. Zach, if you had gone to the two-handed follow through back in March, how many home runs would you have now?**

ZACH WATSON: There's no telling. It's baseball. It's just a mindset.

**Q. Did Mike ever suggest it before the other day?**

ZACH WATSON: I mean, Greg told me to before (inaudible).

PAUL MAINIERI: You're never going to live this down.

**Q. What coach was telling you to hit with one hand?**

ZACH WATSON: Not really one hand, just follow through. Use my top hand more. It's just my approach.

THE MODERATOR: Let's get serious. Anything else back there?

**Q. Coach, how come you decided to start Jake Slaughter at first tonight?**

PAUL MAINIERI: Nick Coomes hurt his thumb last night, or yesterday afternoon in the game, when he dove into first base. He wasn't feeling good enough to play. We went with Jake and decided to make a little change in the lineup and put Zach in the 5 hole. Pretty comfortable in that 5 hole. I don't know if he's going to find his way back into that 9 hole anymore.

**Q. Coach, could you talk a little bit about tomorrow's game and what it takes to close this thing out.**

PAUL MAINIERI: We don't know who we're going to play yet, of course. They'll play tomorrow afternoon. I'll tell you, though, the way this team played tonight, I know they'll be tough to beat.

We're kind of used to playing in tournaments and not knowing who your opponent is. I think our players realize, whoever we play is going to be a quality, formidable opponent. They'll be a little bit down in their pitching staff. That's the advantage you gain by winning in these first two games. But I'm sure they'll all have somebody that's capable.

Eric Walker is going to need to pitch great for us as he has been. I really had a tough decision here with Hess. He was throwing the ball so well despite giving up a home run. He certainly could have finished the deal. But I wanted to have him available tomorrow, and I thought it was a good opportunity to get Hunter in the game and see if he could get back with good command like we know he can.

Fortunately, Hunter didn't throw many pitches in that ninth inning. We'll have them both available. I feel like we're lined up and ready to do it. We've just got to go out and get the job done tomorrow.

**Q. For Kramer and Zach, Coach talked about Southeastern's aggressiveness. The likelihood you see them again is good. Did you get a good feel for that tonight? Do you feel you have an advantage if you should face them again?**

KRAMER ROBERTSON: That team's as tough as hell, man. They execute so well. They know what they do well, and they execute it almost to perfection. It's a good team. We knew that going in.

Again, what Alex did tonight, he gets a lot of credit for his complete games, his shutouts, whatever, but three years I've played with him, this was as important and as big of a performance as he's given us to start out slow and still go four innings and do what he did, that was special.

Whoever we play tomorrow is for a reason. If Rice can beat Southeastern, they deserve it because Southeastern is a good team. And if we face Southeastern again, we know they're aggressive, and they have a game plan and execute really well. So we'll have our hands full. We'll have to play well again if we want to go on.

THE MODERATOR: Zach, do you want to add to that?

ZACH WATSON: Yeah, they're a very good team. They're going to be hard to play against. Everybody is playing great this time of year.

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**Matt Riser**  
**Mac Sceroler**  
**Ryan Byers**

LSU - 11, Southeastern Louisiana - 6

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you could give us a few opening comments, please.

MATT RISER: I thought we battled well. Also made a huge statement the first couple innings, more juice and people scoring there. Had some good energy going back and forth, and we knew, if we could get through the first couple innings and get settled in a bit, we had a shot to get things going there late.

We talk about it all the time, you've got to dominate the middle innings. Today we got dominated in the middle innings. Five runs there in the fifth and sixth combined, final score 12-6. There's your five runs and your difference maker tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Also joining us up here is right fielder Ryan Byers. Ryan, a leadoff home run to start the game and two RBI double squeeze. Talk about those two at bats, please.

RYAN BYERS: That first at bat I was just looking for a particular drive, trying to set a good tone, especially being the leadoff. I battled, fought off a pitch, and then I just got a pitch I could drive. Then the second at bat with the double squeeze, took the first missed curveball and looked at it, and I thought it was going to be (inaudible). I like the pressure, and I just got the job done.

THE MODERATOR: Also joining us starting pitcher Mac Sceroler. Talk about your outing, please.

MAC SCEROLER: I knew going into it it was going to be a tough game. They're a very good ball club. Coming into it, I needed to execute every pitch I threw. I missed my spots on some of the pitches. Can't do that with a good ball club like LSU because they put the ball in play.

**Q. Mac, just talk a little bit about the emotion and kind of what happened in that first inning?**



MAC SCEROLER: I was trying not to let that get to me. I thought it kind of sped up on me a little bit and kind of lost my release point there for a little bit. I thought I settled in a little bit in the second and third innings and so forth.

**Q. Mac, did you like that pace of the offense? Did you feel like your team could hang with that?**

MATT RISER: Yeah, no doubt. We're aggressive, and we're going to set a tone there. Also, very similar to what we do. Very athletic. Strong guys in the middle of the order. Tonight they just punched more than we did. They threw some punches early, we threw some punches early. We countered with it. We talk about it, if you find ways to throw the last punch, you got a good shot to win it. LSU threw the last punch tonight.

**Q. For Matt and Ryan, a pretty aggressive swing by Lange early in the game. Can you kind of talk about that a little bit and later on with some of his adjustments.**

RYAN BYERS: We knew coming in he had a good curveball, and we had to hit the fastball. Earlier, we hit the fastball, and we just couldn't keep up with him. We couldn't hit the curveball late, and he just kind of got to us.

MATT RISER: We set up a game plan, and I think the unique thing about it -- and this is why I like coaching this club. Mac didn't have a strong start and struggled a little bit there, but they're teammates, and they're in this together. So they dug in a little bit to help their teammate out and get themselves back in the ball game. That's why we had some really good at bats early.

Also, he got settled in there in the fourth, fifth, and sixth, and started getting really strong, started located some pitches and working ahead. When he does that, he stops making mistakes. I thought we did a good job of taking those mistakes early when he did give them to us and taking advantage of those runs, which you need against a guy like Lange.

**Q. In order to get the hardware now, do you feel like your team is prepared to handle that adversity will help you the next couple days?**

MATT RISER: Yeah, we talked about in order to win this thing, it's going to come down to winning a



doubleheader tomorrow. Can't worry about the second one, we've got to worry about the first one. Again, we talked about it. At some point in the year, you'll be playing for your life. We put ourselves in that position now.

Still doesn't change our attitude or mentality in this thing. We're still in this thing to win it, but that's going to be taking care of business from here on out. There's no slip up. You slip up, you slip out. We've got to do a good job of taking care of business tomorrow with Rice.

Kept my post-game speech short and quick. Just told the guys to stay aggressive. Don't let this slow you down. Don't let this be a speed bump for you. It just motivates you and keep you going and get ready for 3:00 tomorrow.

**Q. Coach, talk about pitching plans for tomorrow.**

MATT RISER: We'll start right-hander Carlisle Koestler tomorrow, our normal Sunday starter. Post-game speech, besides Mac, I told everybody to be ready to go. When you get to this point in time of the year, whoever and everybody's available off the bench, whether we need an in and out, a pinch runner or pinch hitter, everybody is ready to go. You're fighting for your life. We'll start with Carlisle Koestler, and go from there.

**Q. Ryan, if you would, just kind of talk about you didn't have the outcome, but you were right there toe to toe with them for so long. Do you feel confident about moving forward tomorrow as well?**

RYAN BYERS: Yes, I feel confident about it. Just like Coach said, we've just got to take care of the first one. That's the only way we can go on from there. Just keep playing fast, just keep doing what we're doing, and we feel like we'll be able to take care of them tomorrow at 3:00.