

College World Series: Baton Rouge Regional

Friday, June 2, 2017
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Paul Mainieri
Jared Poche
Zach Watson
Michael Papierski

LSU - 15, Texas Southern - 7

PAUL MAINIERI: I think the most appropriate statement would be to say I'm glad that game is over and we won. That's probably about it. Honestly, that was one of those games that happened once in a while to a game.

We've been playing so good, so crisp, so clean, so smart, and today we didn't do a lot of those things. Defensively we struggled a little bit on the mound. We had struggled to hit their pitching. We made some base running mistakes. We just didn't play very well today.

And as I told the players after the game, at least we won. I remember back in 2009, when we played Southern in our first game, they were beating us 2-0 in the sixth, 2-1 in the seventh. We had to pitch out of a bases loaded jam in the top of the seventh, and then I remember Austin Nola got a two-out base hit to tie the game, and then after that we were able to pull away.

Kind of like today's game. Even when we played Jackson State a couple of years ago, I remember Rhymes and Bregman collided on a routine pop-up. Just strange things happen in these kinds of games. So much talk about, oh, how long is he going to go with Jared? Is he going to take him out after two innings to save him for later? We got away from focusing on playing good, solid baseball. It was my fault more than anybody's.

So I just don't think we looked like a very well coached team out there today, and I'll take the blame for that. But somehow, some way, we found a way to win the game, and that's the important thing. I just want our players to forget about this game as quickly as possible and get ready for tomorrow night. We'll be playing an outstanding ball club tomorrow night.



THE MODERATOR: Starting pitcher, Jared Poche, 4 1/3 innings pitched, eight strikeouts. Jared, talk a little bit about your outing, please.

JARED POCHE: Definitely didn't go as planned, but, you know, all year we've been playing great defense. As a pitcher, as soon as the ball is out of your hands, there's nothing you can throw after that.

I'll take credit on the first half of that game, you know, yeah, we had a few errors, but I didn't pick my teammates up, and I've got to be better than that.

THE MODERATOR: Starting centerfielder Zach Watson, big day at the plate, two home runs, four RBIs. Talk about your day at the plate, please.

ZACH WATSON: It started with BP. I asked Mike before we took BP, I said, hey, Coach, do you think I should swing with two hands all the way through? He said, yeah, give it a shot. My first round went really good, and I said, all right, I'm going to stick with this. I took it to the game and went to the game just like planned, and it worked out really well.

THE MODERATOR: Starting catcher Michael Papierski, likewise big day at the plate, four RBIs and a big home run. Talk about that, please.

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: I got a fastball and put a good swing on it. Poche went out there, and he battled. He didn't have his stuff today, but he went out and threw strikes and gave us a chance to win.

We didn't pick him up as teammates, but we'll be better tomorrow. We're going to play somebody really good, whether that's Rice or Southeastern, and we'll be ready to go.

THE MODERATOR: We'll field questions for the student-athletes.

Q. I guess this could either be for Mike or Zach. What's it say about this team when the top of the lineup isn't going hot, that you guys at the bottom again get it done? Pick up the defense, pick up sort of the troubles you had earlier in the game.

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: Coach has me and Zach at the bottom of the order, and the top of the order has been

producing the whole year. You know, they're going to continue to do that. They've been doing that. That's what they're there for. 1 through 9, we've been swinging the bats well.

Coach said it earlier, we're going to have those little funk here or there, and we're just glad this game's over.

THE MODERATOR: Zach, why don't you follow up, please.

ZACH WATSON: The top of the lineup is not doing so hot the first go through. I feel like me and Pap come in, and we'll start it off pretty good, get a hit here and there, and just really get the game going for the at bats. I mean, the top of our order is really great. It's not just us. It's everybody.

Q. What was the mood kind of in the dugout? Kind of the start the way you did, the slow start. What was everybody telling each other? What was going on mentally with you guys early on in that game?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: You know, obviously, the guy wasn't throwing fast today. Mike had talked to us. We got to stay back. You got to stay thinking the other way. Coomes had that good at bat to get us started with that walk. And then Josh got hit, and I had a big two out hit, and then the guy to my left had that huge home run to get our offenses started.

I mean, you know, we'll be ready -- we're just glad this game's over, like Coach said. That's the biggest thing.

ZACH WATSON: It was very different. Not used to that at all. This is our first game this season like that. I mean, once we started to get going, everybody started going, and we had it a little rough to begin with. I mean, it happens. It's baseball. We've still got to battle. We've still got to come through clutch plays and clutch hits.

THE MODERATOR: Jared?

JARED POCHE: Like they said, we're just glad this one's over, and we came out with a "W."

Q. This can really be for anybody. Usually, when you guys open up a weekend, you're playing on a Friday night, this being an afternoon, does that add to any kind of unusual feeling that contributed at all to this?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: No, I don't think so. I guess we have been playing night games as of late, but still it's the same game of baseball. We've just got to play better. If we want to achieve that ultimate goal, winning a National Championship, that won't cut it today.

We will be better, and we will continue to get better.

Q. Zach, that first home run of yours, high and away. You just kind of yanked it. Were you surprised you got that much of it with the pitch he gave you?

ZACH WATSON: Yeah, I didn't think it was going. I rounded the bag and saw it went over, and I was very pumped up and very excited. To get those runs in, it was a big part of it.

Q. Zach, to clarify, do you normally swing with one hand?

ZACH WATSON: No. My finish through is with one hand. Everybody says I let go of the bat before I even make contact.

JARED POCHE: Ken Griffey, Jr.

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: Yeah, he swings one-handed.

Q. Zach, Cole Freeman called your at bat, that three-run homer, the biggest at bat of the game. I know it's hard to think about it in that moment, but after the fact, do you feel like it was?

ZACH WATSON: I mean, every at bat before that was -- I mean, every bat is the biggest at bat of the game. Every clutch at bat, you need. But I think it had a big part of it. If I didn't have my teammates coming in behind me, like Papierski with a big home run too. It's a big part of everybody. It's not just one player, but I think it helped out a lot.

Q. Hey, Pap, you guys take such a premium on defense. Having five errors through five innings, is that -- what goes through your head as one of the leaders on this defense throughout an early struggle like that?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: You know, we've been good on defense, like Poche said, all year, and we're going to have those couple games. We're just going to flush it and move on to the next one. Like I said earlier, we're just glad it's over. Defensively we struggled a little bit today, but offense, we swing the bats well, and we'll be ready to go tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else for the student-athletes? We'll go ahead and release you guys. Field questions for Coach Mainieri.

Q. I guess, Paul, did you -- do you attribute the errors to just bad luck, of lack of focus, or what was kind of your perspective on that?

PAUL MAINIERI: Just baseball can be a funny game sometimes. I thought we had two really good days of practice leading up. We were glad we were able to get them in because it's been calling for rain every day.

We weren't able to go on the field on Tuesday, and then we were able to practice yesterday, and Wednesday and yesterday. Today we had pregame practice on the field, and everybody looked great and was ready to go.

Oh, my goodness, it was one thing after another. It was like Murphy's law out there today. I thought -- quite frankly, I thought there was a double play ball, and Josh didn't move well for it. It ricocheted off his glove, and Kramer hustled for it and then throws it to first. And Nick wasn't even looking. I think he thought the ball had gotten through the infield. How do you explain a play like that?

There were things I saw today that I haven't seen all year, maybe in a few years. Again, it was just kind of -- I don't know if it was focus. I don't know if it was guys were a little tight, you know, because being back home. We haven't played here in a while in front of our crowd. Or just say that it was just funny baseball. Sometimes it happens.

We've had such a good defensive team all year. We had a little hiccup over in Hoover the one game. I think we made four errors. But I thought that was just an aberration, and I think today was an aberration. I think we have a good defensive team, but today it just -- it was just a bunch of weird things happening.

I don't think it was -- I don't know. It might have been focus. I don't know. How do I know? We just made some errors, and it was a shame. If Kramer turns that double play, Poche gets out of the game with the lead, maybe gets a win. But unfortunately, you know, it gave them the lead. I had to take him out, and he wasn't in line for a win after that. I think that was the biggest shame of the day.

Q. Bottom three hitters in the order went 6 for 10, three homers, a couple doubles from Josh Smith. For those guys to sometimes pick up the top of the order guys when they aren't producing like they normally do, how huge was that today?

PAUL MAINIERI: I'm glad you brought that up because I'm being way too negative up here. We won the game. But I just know we can play better and will play better.

The very positive thing about the game -- and there were a few positives. I thought Caleb Gilbert came in and shut the door. He gave up the one base hit to allow a run to score, but after that, I thought he did a great job. I thought Peterson and Beck both threw the ball well.

But the biggest highlight of the day for me was the bottom third of our order. Josh swung the bat well. We talked enough about Zach's two home runs. And even

he smoked a ball right at the second baseman, and the kid made a diving catch, or he might have had another RBI there.

Papierski had three quality at bats where he got a base hit right-handed, and then he had an sac fly and then a two-run Homer.

I've said this many times, that when your bottom of the order is producing like we have been, I think that gives you a really good offensive team because you know sooner or later Robertson and Freeman and Deichmann and Duplantis are going to get their hits, and they're going to produce some runs. When we're getting production out of the bottom of the order, it just makes it that much more difficult for the other team's pitcher, and I think that makes you a pretty good offensive team.

Q. So much has been made about y'all being the hottest team in the country and so much has gone right for you all in the last couple of weeks. Is this a good wakeup call, maybe a way to refocus?

PAUL MAINIERI: I think so. I think maybe you're right about that. Sometimes you think the game is easy because you play so well -- I mean, we've played well for an extended period of time now. Today was just one of those days where -- I think it was my fault more than anybody's. There was so much talk, who is he going to pitch? If he pitches Poche, is he going to get him out of the game early so we can have him available on Monday in case we need him? As though there wasn't even an opponent we had to go out there and play against.

We play better when we focus on the other team. What do we have to do to go beat these guys? Instead of, well, let's see how the game plays out. If we get an early lead, we can hook them. If you do that -- I mean, there was never any intention of disrespecting the opponent, I can assure you of that. But when you lose that edge, when you feel like -- you know, you don't have to play your very best to beat somebody, I think sometimes it's a good wakeup call. Fortunately, we were still able to win the game.

Like I told you before, there's been a history of these kinds of games, and thank goodness, we ended up winning it. There's been other games where this has happened, and we haven't won it. So we will enjoy the victory, put it behind us, and get ready for a really tough team tomorrow.

Q. Poche today looked kind of down up here, and reasonably so with seven runs coming while he was on the mound. But he did have eight strikeouts, and you kind of felt that, when the bat

wasn't hitting the ball, that he had good command out there. How did you lift him up after coming off the mound after a tough day?

PAUL MAINIERI: You know, I don't have my glasses on. How many earned runs were there? One earned run out of seven. Jared Poche did the best he could. He gave up a leadoff hit. He gave up another base hit in the first inning. We were kind of getting back on our heels a little bit. It kind of shocked us all that they would get that kind of good swings.

But if you think about the way Jared Poche has pitched his whole career, he's been in trouble almost every inning of his career, but he finds a way to get out of it. Usually, you have to play good defense behind him to get out of it because he's not really a strikeout pitcher. The truth of the matter is we didn't play good defense behind him.

Jared is such a team oriented guy. He's not ever going to blame a teammate. He's never going to point fingers. He's going to be the consummate teammate to everybody. But it had to be a little frustrating for him. I think the last batter he faced was a perfect double play ball that went between Kramer's legs and should have ended the inning. Instead, they got two runs, and I had to yank him out of the game.

Jared wasn't real, real sharp. I'll admit that. He did end up striking out a lot of batters, which shows you how he raises his game at points. When you think he's done, he's still out there competing. But it was just a tough combination of things today, and it's a shame that Jared couldn't get the win. We really wanted that bad for him. But he'll just have to wait for the next outing.

Q. Caleb Gilbert and Todd Peterson kind of stabilized things. When you see those guys go out there and give you that, is that big just to save the bullpen going forward? I guess, do you see either of those guys coming back if it gets to that point?

PAUL MAINIERI: Well, we hooked Gilbert after -- I think he had 49 pitches, if I'm not mistaken.

THE MODERATOR: 47.

PAUL MAINIERI: 47 pitches. I think he'll be ready to go on Monday if necessary. I think even Jared will be ready for a little bit on Monday if necessary.

Peterson, I thought, threw the ball as well as I've seen him throw it in a long time. His velocity was great. He was right there in the strike zone. And Matthew did a nice job as well.

Listen, tomorrow we've got Lange starting, which

hopefully he'll pitch deep in the game. You got Bush available, Hess available, Newman available. So I think we've got plenty of bullpen for tomorrow night. Hopefully, on Sunday, we'll see, when the dust settles tomorrow night, how much we'll have to go.

Obviously, it would be very beneficial to be in the winners bracket all the way through and take care of business. But we'll have enough to keep competing with.

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Michael Robertson Anthony Martinez Jose Camacho

THE MODERATOR: Get us going with a few opening comments.

MICHAEL ROBERTSON: I like the way that we started the game. We obviously had a lot of synergy, which I thought that was very important, us getting off to a good start so we can relax.

Our starting pitcher did that. We put some really good swings on what I thought was one of the best pitchers in the nation. So we did a great job of creating pressure early on.

Obviously, the second inning, we missed the (inaudible), and the game turned. All in all, we stayed in there against one of the best teams in the country. It tells a lot about this ball club and where this program is headed. All in all, just a lot of pressure. .294 hitting team, and they have a lot, a lot of pressure. It wasn't an easy task.

(Inaudible). It was a walk and hit by pitch. Watson put two good swings on him. They get two home runs. Just a lot of pressure. Maybe a little bit too much for us that we're not used to seeing.

But all in all, I thought our kids collectively a good team effort.

THE MODERATOR: Starting pitcher Anthony Martinez. Anthony, why don't you talk a little bit about that second inning and maybe the Watson at bat.

ANTHONY MARTINEZ: When I first came in, I knew it was going to be a tough game, and we had to compete. As soon as I got here, I was like I have to give it my best, and this is what I've been waiting for.

I started off really good. Our offense started off really good. I knew I had to come in and come in clutch and do what I had to do.

That second inning, I just left a change-up high. I knew I would have to pay for my mistakes, but that was one



of the mistakes that cost me a lot. I just went from there and did what I had to do.

THE MODERATOR: Third baseman Jose Camacho, big day at the plate for you as well as a nice play defensively. Three big hits. Talk about your day, please.

JOSE CAMACHO: I just went in with the approach. We talked about it all weekend. I'm just looking for fastballs.

Q. (No microphone).

JOSE CAMACHO: Coming in here as the underdogs, I've been watching LSU. I knew they were on an 11-win streak. We came in here and tried to give it all we had.