



NCAA



2022 DIVISION I
BASEBALL
CHAMPIONSHIP
BLACKSBURG REGIONAL



Virginia Tech Baseball
John Szefc Q&A Highlights
Practice presser
June 2, 2022

Opening statement:

We're excited to have the opportunity to host this thing. I think our guys have earned the opportunity. They played tremendous all year and got us in the position to host a regional here in Blacksburg for the first time in nine years. I think it's really cool that we get that chance. I think there's a big advantage to hosting a regional. Your guys get a lot more rest and recovery as opposed to having to travel like Gonzaga just did yesterday. I just give a lot of credit to our coaches and our players for kind of getting us to this point. We look forward to starting to play tomorrow.

On the starting pitcher for the Hokies' opening game:

(Drue) Hackenberg is going to start tomorrow. We're going to roll him out there on Saturday. At this point, we're just going to go game by game and see how it goes. We just feel Hackenberg is a little bit of a better matchup at this point. It's not a knock on (Griffin Green). He's gotten us here. One of the reasons we're sitting at this table, is him. It has nothing to do with that. At this stage of the game, at this time of the year, it's all about matchups. Matchups, matchups, matchups. That's it.

On the keys winning a regional:

I don't think it's really different than doing what we've been doing. Playing the games the way they are, preparing the way we prepared. My message to the guys yesterday was 'You don't really have to do anything more than you've already done. You don't have to throw a better slider or hit the ball harder or run faster.' I don't think we're going to see anything in this regional we haven't seen in the ACC over the course of the last 10 weeks. I think we've played some really good people and that's why we're sitting here in Blacksburg opposed to being someplace else. As far as strategies, it's really not that way. It's really just trying to prepare your guys, make sure they're rested and go out and do what you've been doing. I know that doesn't sound exciting, but that's really what it is from my perspective.

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On having the opportunity to host a regional in his fifth season in Blacksburg:

Yeah, I really didn't even think about that. This is maybe going to sound bad, maybe the administration wouldn't like it, but I never really had a five-year plan. My plan was always just day-by-day. Try to get the best players we can get, prepare them, and take care of them with all the stuff we do, support people. It's nice to kind of look back on it now, the fact that we're here and having success, but I kind of expected that to happen at some point or another. I could never tell you exactly when or the year. The whole COVID thing was a speed bump for everybody and kind of slowed some things down. We lost some pretty good players. I thought we thought we were going to have a good year in '20 there. That was Gavin (Cross) and Cade (Hunter) freshman year. I just try to work off of experience I guess and kind of what I've seen over the years. We're lucky. I think we have a good coaching staff, and we have a lot of different dynamic players on this team that can do different things. Really, from my perspective you just put guys in position to be successful and watch them play. On another note, the coolest thing for me quite honestly is being where our guys don't have to travel and can play this thing at home and then you can watch all the preparation that's going on for the ballpark. I really have to thank our administration for that because they're working to put on a really good regional here. They did the same thing for softball the last two weekends. They have experience doing it and I've been to some regionals before where that wasn't necessarily the case. I have to give a lot of our people credit for putting on a first-class event here and one that guys will remember for a long time, or at least until next week, hopefully.

On the success of the bullpen this season:

I just think we have a lot of good players. I think we have a lot of good guys in the bullpen that have a lot of talent and we had just about every guy there at some point or another went out and had success and it helped their confidence level and then they went out and did it again, and then did it again. I think also, them getting opportunity to do it and then having success, nothing brings more confidence than having success, whether it's hitting, catching, pitching, whatever it is. We can talk until we're dead in the face here about chemistry and everything else, and I think our guys have a lot of it, but we also just have a lot of guys that are really good. They're not doing it with smoke and mirrors, they're doing it because they're good and because they work at it and because they have a lot of confidence in what they're doing. That's what brings them here. There're no teams that get here just because they're really close friends and stuff like that. It's not about it. It's about, is a guy good enough or is he not, and can he perform or can he not? I think you have guys here that are good enough and they've performed well and they're kind of enjoying the fruits of it for a few hours here until they get back after it again because once tomorrow rolls around it's not about the record, or seeds, or statistics. It's not about any of that stuff. It's about how prepared are you and how can you go out there and do what you've

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been doing all year. Except, probably on a higher level because all the opponents we're going to be play are going to be operating on a higher level too.

On Cade Hunter's breakout season:

Since he's been here, he's been really consistent. He's been the same guy every day. I don't think he gets too high or too low. I think last year was a really difficult year for him. He had that broken hand and really wasn't a factor down the stretch. We didn't finish too well, obviously. Last summer really beneficial for him too because he had to figure some things out in Cape Cod and a lot of things didn't go his way. He had to go through things and he kind of stayed a course and he came back here a better player. I really think, I've said this before, I'm really impressed with what he's done defensively as he has offensively. He's handled our pitching staff. He's caught almost every game. Everyone looks at offensive numbers and the hammer and everything else, but if you watch what the guy does behind the plate and how he handles the staff, I think he's a great stabilizing factor for our team in what he does defensively and how he handles the pitching staff.

On the Wright State series early this season and what the matchup in regionals will be like:

We're playing the same players. They're not any different. They might be playing different, but I think we're probably a lot better than we were then too. I know Alex Sogard. He's a very good coach. He will have his guys 100% prepared, but we will too. We do an awful lot of work in scouting work, in video work, in preparation. I actually think playing the series against them is beneficial for us. The fact that we went out there and were beaten on Friday. Like, our guys remember that. I remember every single loss we we've had this year and that was our very first and it was our first at home. It's better for us that that happened, that that series played than if it wasn't, if we had played someone else. Our guys know who Wright State is. If that school just popped up on the board on Monday and our guys didn't know who they were, they'd be like 'Yeah, they're just another four seed.' But I will tell you, every four seed in this tournament is good. They've earned their way. Most of them have won their conference tournaments. They belong here. On four different occasions, I was a four seed. I know what it feels like to be a four seed and how good your guys are and how hot your guys are and how much confidence they play with. My point of Wright State is, I think our guys have a respect for Wright State because they played against them before as opposed to if we were assigned another four-seed that our guys wouldn't even know. I really think that that series will be beneficial to us playing them this weekend.

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Virginia Tech Baseball

Gavin Cross Q&A Highlights

Practice presser

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On the confidence level of the team:

"First and foremost, we're playing with confidence and we trust each other regardless of the opponent. We're going to try to play our game; pitch and play good defense, while getting timely hits and just playing together. That's kind of the formula to win."

On bouncing back from a loss to UNC:

"Throughout the season we've had some slow starts to games and we just continue to trust the offense. It doesn't matter whether me and Cade (Hunter) aren't hitting. We know we got Jack (Hurley), Tanner (Schobel) and all the way down through the order. Any guy can spark the lineup. We ran into a good guy on Friday in Charlotte and in baseball any given day anything can happen. We just trust each other to prepare the right way and go play."

On the fan support for the team this season at home:

"I think our fans are a big part of what we do here. It's always good whenever we're going out and playing in front of a lot of people, but at the same time we're just going out there trying to play the game. Regardless of how many people are in the stands, where we're at, or what kind of field we're on doesn't really matter. We just go out and play with a chip on our shoulder and prove to everyone here and each other that we're here to win."

On how to play with expectations:

"A lot of us here weren't necessarily the biggest names or had a lot of crazy offers and stuff like that. So, coming in, we're trying to prove ourselves as far as that we can play in this league and compete in this league. There's still people doubting us even though we've had a really good year which is fine, it doesn't really bother us. We don't really look into it. We just keep that chip on our shoulder to continue to prove people wrong and go out there and play hard for each other and keep putting up (wins)."

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On the excitement level of hosting a regional:

“We worked so hard for this throughout the whole year and we love each other as teammates so if we want to continue to play together, that means we have to win. We just want to do whatever we can do to win. We're going to try to do that as long as we can with each other.”

**Virginia Tech Baseball
Cade Hunter Q&A Highlights
Practice presser
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On the confidence level going into the regional and having faced Wright State before:

I think one of the advantages we have is we've played them before. They played us, we played them. We've got all of the film that we need on everyone in their dugout and they've got all of the film they need on everyone in our dugout. It should be a good match up and we're excited to get out there.

On what gives the team confidence to make adjustments in-game if they struggle similar to their last game at the ACC Tournament:

I think Gavin (Cross) nailed it on the head. I think there's been multiple times where we go down quick with one or two outs to start an inning, and then we end up scoring five runs on two outs. It really only takes one big hit for us to get that spark going. We're a dynamic offense and I think at any given moment we can put some runs up on other teams.

On the work the program put in to get back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in nine years:

I think it's just all of our mindsets. Our mindset has just been 'focus on the day.' Especially this year, I think this group is a bit different. From the first 6:00 a.m. lift until today at practice, we've had the same energy and same focus. It takes that along with the bond that we have with each other and how we enjoy everything we do that has brought us up this ladder from a couple of years ago to where we are now.

On facing Wright State such a long time ago and how both teams have grown since then:

Wright State was our last series before we went to Georgia Tech. We lost on Friday to them and came back to win the series which showed a little bit of fight that we were excited about.

Then we went to Georgia Tech where we got swept and after that we lost our first game to Pitt. We had a

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choice to make, we could just roll over and keep getting beat or we could make a change, and that's what we did. We all got together and knew that we had a chance to do something special. Everyone who needed to step up, stepped up. Our bullpen stepped up in a crazy way, they've been shoving all year since then. We ended up winning every series after that. We have that confidence that we were at the bottom and now we're at the top. With Wright State, I think they had a pretty up and down year, but then they ended up getting an automatic bid by winning their conference tournament so I know they're hot right now too and it should be a great match up.

On what has enabled the success of both Griffin Green and Drue Hackenberg:

They're two of the best competitors I think I've ever played with. They just know that they can throw it right by people and they've also learned that if they put it in play, we've got a great defense behind us. On top of that, they know that our offense is going to score runs so they don't try to do too much. Even if they score a couple of runs early, it doesn't faze them. They know we'll score and we'll just shut them down for the second half of the game. The biggest thing is how they attack hitters and the way they compete. It's just been awesome to be a part of it.

On his long road back with his injury and being such a productive hitter for the offense:

I've been smelling the roses ever since the first game. After going down last year, it was really hard to watch, especially with how the back end of the year ended up. I've just been grateful for being able to go out there and do what I do with a bunch of guys that I enjoy playing with. The offensive side of the ball is great, but I really pride myself on being there for my pitchers. That's always been my main focus, the offensive side is just the icing on the cake.

On the excitement level of the team heading into tomorrow's regional opener:

The excitement is obviously very high, it's awesome to see the banners go up as we practice. I think tomorrow it's going to be more of a focus-driven energy than anything else. We know we have a job to do and we're excited to go play.



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Griffin Green Q&A Highlights
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On the confidence level going into the regional and having faced Wright State before:

I think our confidence originates from our relaxed attitude, going out there and having fun. Also, we've already played them this year so we definitely have a good expectation of what's to come.

On what has it been like to see the fanbase build behind the team and how is that going to be an advantage this weekend:

We all play with a blue-collared attitude. Like Coach says, we might not have these big names but we go out there and play the game hard every single day, and I think the fan base definitely sees that.

On taking a minute to appreciate the regional signs and the ACC championship sign placed in right field:

That was really cool, looking out from the bullpen this morning. We haven't had that since 2013 and I think that really shows us that this program is going in the right direction. We've got the coaches working hard with us every single day and a great group.

On the excitement level of the team heading into tomorrow:

That excitement level is there but we just have to control what we can control, go out there and just have fun and play the same game we've been playing all year.