

2015 Men's College World Series

Friday, June 12
Press Conference

Florida Arkansas Virginia Miami

THE MODERATOR: This is the press conference for the coaches that are playing in games on Saturday. Moving from my right, Miami Head Coach Jim Morris, Virginia Head Coach Brian O'Connor, Florida Head Coach Kevin O'Sullivan, and Arkansas head coach Dave Van Horn.

COACH MORRIS: It's great to be back to Omaha first. It's been a while since we've been here. Made me really appreciate getting back here. A lot of times when I first got here, my first 15 years, it's gotten tougher and tougher with parity in college baseball and nationwide. There's no question, I've seen the expansion from 48 to 64 teams, and just to win two tournaments to get here, it's a tremendous achievement by everybody. I'd like to congratulate all the teams that are here because I've been around a long time and I've seen the advancement of college baseball. It's a great thing in Omaha and what it's done. Of course, the new stadium is beautiful. The ball is carrying a bit. I like a few balls in the seats. I like the home runs. Of course, I don't want to go back to the '90s where pop-ups are all going out, but it's a great thing and a beautiful park. Excited to be here.

COACH O'CONNOR: We're excited to be here as well. I sat at this table a year ago in defeat of losing the National Championship. Just proud of our players that they fought and grinded away to get back here to Omaha. Our journey this year was a bit of a challenge to get here, but our guys are enjoying the moment. Very, very proud of what they've accomplished, as I know these other coaches are. I'll tell you, the eight teams that are here in Omaha, it should be very, very exciting for the fans because you have some traditional powers in college baseball that have been powerful for 30 and 40 years. You have some teams that have been successful over the last 10 or 15, and it should be an exciting time for the fans here in Omaha. They should be seeing some great baseball. We're excited to



be here and happy to be back in Omaha.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: I think I'll echo the same type of thing that Coach Morris said. We were fortunate enough to get here three years in a row in '10, '11, and '12 and didn't get back here until this year. I think from my perspective, I think I've enjoyed this journey a little bit more than the other ones. I think I've maybe kind of taken a step back and appreciate how difficult it is to get here. I know our players are excited too. I think the more you do this, the more you enjoy the enjoyment that the players have when they achieve something like this. To see them get on the plane yesterday, to see them get on the field today for the first time, it was certainly enjoyable from my standpoint. The other seven teams out here, this is going to be very competitive. We've played, obviously, some teams that are out here, and we know how talented they are. It should be a great couple weeks of baseball. We just feel fortunate that we're here.

COACH VAN HORN: Basically, just same as the other three coaches. Very excited to be here and just to watch the enjoyment on our team's faces this past weekend is something that, I think, all coaches, we live for that. It's not about us. It's about the players. It's about the university. We've taken a -- it's been a journey for us. 15-15 record early April, and just kind of held it together. I've given all the credit to the players. I think that they're pretty strong, mentally strong bunch. It's been fun watching them get better week by week and find ways to win on the weekend and win just enough to get to a regional and then win a regional, a Super Regional, and just really happy for our fan base and everyone involved with the program.

Q. Dave, I guess Andrew just won another award. What do you think about all the stuff that he's getting?

COACH VAN HORN: Andrew just won the College Player of the Year Award. Just a great honor for him and his family. Andrew is a pretty humble kid. He doesn't say a whole lot. He does take a lot of things personal if it doesn't go well. I know very rarely coaches have an opportunity to coach someone as talented as Andrew Benintendi. For him to be recognized nationally is great for him, but it's also very good for the University of Arkansas, and just excited for him.

Q. Dave and Brian, I guess both of you guys in the middle of the season, things weren't looking so hot, you guys were like four weeks ago. I guess from your perspective, what was kind of the one moment or turning point that you felt turned it positive for your team.

COACH O'CONNOR: For us, I would say it was probably our final weekend of the ACC regular season down at Chapel Hill. We were going into that weekend in a situation that we needed to win to get ourselves into the ACC Tournament. The fact that we were able to go down there and sweep North Carolina was a big moment for our ballclub. It happened to be a moment that we were closer to healthy, other than Nathan Kirby, and our team started to play with a little bit more confidence. When Miami came to town about five weeks prior to that, for our young players, we were able to win that series against Jim's team. For our young players, I think that was a big moment for them because, as good as Miami is as a team this year, for us to win that series, I think was a big moment. Certainly, we didn't play well in the ACC Tournament. We played some great teams and went 1-3 but were able to figure it out and put it together in the NCAA Tournament.

COACH VAN HORN: There's a few weekends that really jump out at me, but we opened the conference series and we go to Vanderbilt. We blow a three-run lead -- actually, a four-run lead in the bottom of the ninth on the road. They tied it up, and we lost in extra innings. They put it on us in Game 2, and then we lose 1-0. They score the bottom of the ninth in Game 3, and we leave there 0-3. Then we get to go back and play LSU at our place on a Thursday, Friday, Saturday. We win the first game and lose the next two. We're 1-5, and we're struggling. We let some games slip away. We really didn't have enough at the time. Then we beat Ole Miss. We won that series, won the deciding game on a Sunday. Then we went on the road to Auburn, and we were losing, I think, into the seventh inning, and I think they were -- they hadn't lost a game that they had been ahead late. We came back and beat them late and won that series on the road. I think that's when we started believing, hey, we can do this. There was other series in there. The A&M series on the road, they beat us pretty good in Game 1. Game 2, they're beating us. We get a rain delay overnight, and we're down four or five runs. We got nine outs left, and we come back and beat them the next day. We score eight or nine runs. We shocked them. And then we beat them again. It got delayed as well with rain. We ended up winning that series on the road. I think that's when the team believed we could play with anybody in the country on any given day. We're a little thinner in some areas than the top teams, but we have just

enough some days. I'd have to say those are what jump out at me.

Q. First of all, congratulations, coaches, for getting your teams to the Elite Eight. I asked this question to the coaches this morning: With the personality of TD Ameritrade Park and how big it plays, maybe each one of you could enlighten us about your defense, what you like about your defense going into the championships here.

COACH MORRIS: It's a big park, and it looks like to me the outfield is going to be very important. We've got a very good centerfielder. I think our outfield is good, and we've got to run and catch some balls out there, no question. The playing surface is great. I think everybody here's played pretty good defense to get to where we're at. I think the defensive part of it is important. In particular, if it you don't score a lot of runs. To me, the ball was carrying better today than I expected, and the weather was not very good. It probably carried better when the weather is good. I think that it should be a well-balanced game if we get that. If we can pitch, play defense, whichever club it is. We pitch and play defense and get some hits, hit a couple of home runs to somebody.

COACH O'CONNOR: We feel good about our infield defense. Two guys on the left side for us played in those positions here last year. The ballpark, the infield and the playing surface plays true. It's a great ballpark. Hopefully, the ball does fly a little bit more. We, at the end of our 50-minute BP today, the last 10 minutes, we played home run derby. We had a few guys hit balls out that I didn't think could hit balls out. Maybe that's encouraging. We had a guy hit a ball out the last swing of BP. Guys were having fun with it a little bit. I think they were surprised. There were many of those balls last year that many of them hit -- Mike Papi hit one last year that many thought for sure was gone and hit the warning track. Hopefully, it plays a little truer. Whoever plays good defense here will have a chance to win it.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: As far as our team is concerned, I think it's been well documented about how I feel about our team defensively. We start two freshmen behind the plate, and they've both done a tremendous job. Richie Martin, our shortstop, he might be the most improved player I've ever coached from year to year defensively. He ended up going the first round with Oakland. And Dalton Guthrie, our second baseman, high school shortstop, tremendous baseball IQ, really good player. And then in centerfield we've got Buddy Reed, a sophomore that played corner for us last year. But after the year we felt he might give us more range. That's after we won the championship with Harrison Bader in center, and we moved him to left. Then you look at Josh Tobias, who had one error

all year. That's unheard of. Defense has been our strength all year, and we really haven't let up. We go through peaks and valleys pitching-wise, but that's the part of the game that's been a main stray for us. I agree with the coaches about the ball carrying. The ball jumped off the bat for us today as well. I would think you'll see more home runs this weekend, and I think it's good for everybody.

COACH VAN HORN: As far as defense, we have a veteran outfield. Benintendi in center started every game last year as a freshman and played every game this year. Tyler Spoon in right, he was drafted as well. Tremendous throwing arm, very accurate, gets good reads on the ball. And Joe Serrano, we converted to an outfielder four years ago. He played left field for us in 2012, the last time we were here, he ended up cracking the lineup about two or three weeks left in the season, and he's been there ever since. So they're a veteran group. They don't make a lot of mistakes. Maybe not as athletic as some of the SEC outfielders, like Florida or LSU, they're just flying and cover the ground. But they don't make many mistakes. Infield-wise, we're pretty solid. We field .976 this year. We were close to .980, and we let that slip a little bit. For the most part our defense is solid. This field right here, it's very true. The infield is a little slower than some of the infields we play on. We play on a little different type of grass, same as Florida and probably Miami and more of a Bermuda grass. This looks like more of a thicker bladed grass, like I'm a grass expert. Anyway, it is a big outfield, and I think the baseball's going to back these outfielders up a little bit. I know, just being here in '12 and watching games of this series here on TV, it looked like you couldn't score from second on a single and it's hard to go from first to third because the outfielders were so shallow. I think it's going to make a difference being able to run the bases, because they're going to play a little deeper and are going to be taking a chance of the ball being hit over their head.

Q. This is for Brian: How would you compare this year's team to last year's team? I'm assuming that Connor's going to start tomorrow. What kind of season has he had for you?

COACH O'CONNOR: Connor Jones will start tomorrow. He's had a really interesting year for us. He's been our second starter all year long until Nathan Kirby went down, and we moved him to Friday. Connor is as talented as they come. He's very highly thought of prospect out of high school. Pitched a lot in relief for us last year. Was in our rotation at the beginning of this year. Nate went down, moves into the Friday, and he's been absolutely tremendous consistent since he's moved into the first spot. So I'm excited to see him go out and compete tomorrow. He's very, very talented. Our pitching coach, Coach Kuhn, has done a tremendous job with that young man. I think he's got a

very, very bright future. This team is different. Every team is different. This team is certainly different than last year's ballclub. A lot of those position players are gone in professional baseball. Now it gives an opportunity for many new players. We don't probably have as much depth this year as we had on last year's ballclub. Last year's club from an offensive standpoint could stand at the plate and just swing more. This ballclub, maybe could manufacture runs more than last year's team. Love them both. They're just different.

Q. For Coach O'Sullivan, how would you compare Virginia when you were there in the '90s to where it is now?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Coach O'Connor and his staff have taken that program to another level. They've put themselves to the elite in the country. When I coached there in '95 and '96, I was fortunate that, when I got there, there was some talented pitchers. But just watching Brian and his staff do what they've done, they've been as consistent as anyone in the country the last 10 or 12 years. I admire their staff and what they've done. Like I said, it's one thing to do it over the course of a few years, but to do it at the length that they have has been very, very impressive.

Q. Coach Morris, you said earlier this week this could be the most talented Florida team you've faced since you've been at Miami. What makes them so special?

COACH MORRIS: They've got great arms. They're so talented defensively. They've got probably the best shortstop in college baseball. I love watching him play. And the progress he's made, I love watching those guys more than anything. They're just an outstanding club. Two catchers, as he said, but just a very solid, very athletic club with great arms on the mound and very well coached. Sully and his staff have done a great job.

Q. I guess we already got Virginia's starting pitcher. Could the other three tell us your starters for the weekend.

COACH MORRIS: Suarez is starting for us.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: Logan Shore will start for us.

COACH VAN HORN: Trey Killian.

Q. Dave, it's been a while since you guys played LSU, but do they seem to be more aggressive on the bases this year?

COACH VAN HORN: I think they've got two outfielders that can flat out fly. They've got a player that leads the league in stolen bases. If they get ahead of you, they're very aggressive. I know against us, there were a couple of games where they were hitting and running

first pitch, first inning. They didn't waste any time. So, yeah, I'm going to say they're very aggressive.

Q. Kevin, the impact of moving Bader to the leadoff spot in the postseason, what does that say about Guthrie, that he kind of accepted going to ninth in the order?

COACH O'SULLIVAN: It was really out of necessity because I think it was a Saturday game against LSU in the SEC tournament. Dalton had hurt his wrist. So he wasn't going to play on Sunday against Vanderbilt. Harrison had been struggling at the plate a couple of weeks, and I think he got a couple of hits against LSU. I slept on it and woke up the next morning and felt like, maybe if I put him in the leadoff spot and maybe showed him some positiveness after coming off a good game on Saturday, maybe it would jump start him. Sometimes you make moves, they work out. Sometimes you don't. That one has seemed to help our club. He led that game off with a home run, kind of ignited us a little bit. He's a very emotional-type player. He's done a really good job in that role. I don't know if he's your prototypical leadoff-type hitter, but he can run, and he does have the ability to drive the ball over the outfielder's head, which is unique for a lead-off hitter. I think our offense has been really good. One of the reasons I think it has, it kind of gives him some confidence going into the postseason here.

Q. Brian, I read earlier in the week where you said Kirby had been able to throw in practice, and you were hopeful he was maybe going to be able to pitch this weekend. How is he doing? What's the latest? Is there a chance he could pitch tomorrow?

COACH O'CONNOR: He's doing great. Monday he threw a 40-pitch simulated scrimmage against batters. The velocity was great. 89, 93, 94. Breaking ball was good. Change-up was good. It was inconsistent. He hasn't faced a batter in eight weeks. We've been working on a progression for four or five weeks to get him to the point that we were on Monday. I think we'll know more within the next couple of days how much he could help us. I don't anticipate that it would be in a starting role, in all fairness to him. I just don't think he's built up for that. But he is available. I'm just not quite sure in what capacity yet. We'll see. I think the game will dictate that. He's healthy and looks good.

Q. This is for both Kevin and for Jim: I don't know if you guys have played any non-conference opponent, either of you, quite as much as you have the other going into this, but this is the first time in the college World Series. What's the nature of the rivalry, if any, between your two programs?

COACH MORRIS: It's definitely a rivalry, no question about that, because we compete recruiting against some of the same players, from the same state, and

we play -- used to play more than we do before we went into the ACC. We used to play two series, two weekends instead of one weekend. But it's a great series, and it's one that I like early in the season because it answers some questions for you. You face good pitching, and you see guys this year, it was the third weekend of the year, and you get a chance to see what you can do against really good competition early. We've got some adjustments for our team. We're playing much better in the second half than we did in the first half, and I think that's part of resting your team. You've got to play good people to be able to do that. No question it's a competitive rivalry, and it's a great rivalry.

COACH O'SULLIVAN: I would say the same thing. I think, when you compete against the talented clubs year in and year out like Miami and the tradition they have, our players know that. Recruiting, the way recruiting is nowadays, you're recruiting kids that are sophomores and younger and younger, it does get to be competitive. But there's a mutual respect in our rivalry. Jim and his staff, you've got to come ready to play. They're not going to beat themselves. Like Jim said, I like playing them early in the year. It kind of gives you a barometer where your team's at, where you need to look at some areas to look for improvement. I think Jim will tell you the same thing, the state of Florida itself, there's so many good teams. You know, Florida State year in and year out. You've got South Florida, who was in our Regional. Florida Atlantic was in our Regional. North Florida won 40-plus games. There's a lot of good teams in our state. Recruiting does get to be competitive. It's just not our weekend games. It's our midweeks as well that get to be very competitive.

Q. Coach Van Horn, about playing Virginia again, what did you learn by playing them last year? How many guys on the team were part of that, and how can that help in this situation?

COACH VAN HORN: We still have a few of our starters back from last year, and really only one weekend starter pitcher and a couple guys that were out of the pen that were young last year. What we learned was -- I've said this two or three times this week, that we left there, I told our coaching staff, that's the best team we've played all year. They were really good. Just don't make any mistakes. They don't make any mistakes. They pitched. Can't run on them, holding runners. I could go on and on and on. Kind of like Coach O'Sullivan said earlier, they're just one of the top programs in the country, and they're going to be good every year as long as that staff's there. We know we have to play a perfect game if we're going to beat them.

Q. This is for Brian: Wonder if you got to see

Benintendi play at all. What are your thoughts about him on the season going against him tomorrow?

COACH MORRIS: Andrew is as good as they come in the college game. We got to watch three or four of their games on video, since we knew we were playing Arkansas. He's really skilled. He can run. He certainly can swing the bat. He's a threat to hit the ball out of the ballpark. Just as talented as you see in our game. The thing I've been impressed is, when you look back at the year he's had, the consistency that guy has played with. He's very, very skilled, consistent for them, and obviously has a lot to do with how they go.