

College World Series: Baton Rouge Super Regional

Sunday, June 11, 2017

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Paul Mainieri

Michael Papierski

Kramer Robertson

Caleb Gilbert

LSU 14, Mississippi State 4

Q: Can you just describe leaving the field for the last time and taking that victory lap?

KRAMER ROBERTSON: I'm not sure it's sunk in yet. What a memory. I'm kind of at a loss for words. As we were closing out that inning, I was just overcome with emotion. Just to think back about where I started and now to be going to Omaha in my last year with the guys I consider to be my brothers, it's something I'll never forget. It's why I came back to school, it's why we all came back to LSU for nights like tonight.

Q: What was the wait like having to wait through two rain delays and finishing the game at 1:30 in the morning?

KRAMER ROBERTSON: I think I told Coach (Paul Mainieri), it's not like I haven't waited long enough for this moment; we had to have a rain delay. I've waited my entire baseball career, my entire life to experience that dog pile and win a super regional so I could wait a little while longer through a couple rain delays.

Q: When you lost the lead in the third inning, how did your pitching plans change?

PAUL MAINIERI: Of course, it didn't go as planned. I thought Jared (Poche') was extremely sharp in those first two innings, particularly in the first inning striking out (Ryan) Gridley and (Brent) Rooker, two outstanding hitters. I just felt that he was going to be on and that it was going to be his night. In the third inning, he just lost command and feel for his pitches and he was getting frustrated, which is uncharacteristic of Jared. I didn't want to take him out of the game, but I had to do what was best for the team and he understood that. Fortunately for us, we had a young man come in and meet the challenge and he did a tremendous job. I think Caleb Gilbert is the story of the game. He came in and put the team on his back and steadied the ship. We knew we were going to hit more, everybody knew we were going to hit and get more runs, but we just needed to know that we were going to hold them. I told these guys 'Caleb is going to do a great job and we'll use whoever we need to and we're going to hold them down. Let's not get frustrated, let's not get impatient, let's take it one at-bat at a time and let's do our job.' Caleb was fantastic, he probably could have finished the thing but I thought that was the right time to get him out of there and we needed Hunter (Newman) to get in the game anyway.

Q: How important was it to get through the jam in the third inning and go five and two-thirds?

CALEB GILBERT: That was a critical part of the game. They had all the momentum on their side,

they put up two runs before I came out and I went in there and just made some pitches to get ahead in the count. I didn't make my put-aways and they took advantage of it. After that, I just had the mindset of minimizing, you know, if they get two, don't let them get three. I was just focusing on the next hitter and that first-pitch strike and I got out of it and set the tone for the rest of the way.

PAUL MAINIERI: Obviously, it was a critical point of the game. We had started out like gangbusters offensively, we actually left a runner or two out there. We probably could have had another run or two and, instead of being up three to nothing, we could have been up four or five to nothing. I felt confident in our offense that we were going to get it going. When Jared ran into trouble there, Caleb came in and minimized the damage and really dominated the game from that point forward. That was obviously a critical point, if they had gotten out to a three- or four-run lead, it would have been much more difficult. I thought Caleb did a super job coming in at that moment and as the game went on.

Q: Michael Papierski has driven in the go-ahead runs in both last night's game and tonight's game, what is it about him when he gets up in those big situations that has allowed him to deliver lately?

PAUL MAINIERI: When he went up to bat with the bases loaded and the crowd stood up and cheered, it was reminiscent of 2008 when Blake Dean would come up to the plate and the anticipation of the crowd made me think 'This poor kid, if he doesn't come through with a big hit here, he's going to let everybody down.' But Blake invariably would come through with a big hit and Pap had that same experience today. The bases were loaded, the crowd was going crazy and Pap just looked so confident up there, you could just tell he was going to get it done and he smoked that ball to the right field corner. When he came back to the dugout after he had scored, I told him 'You just had your Blake Dean moment.' What a memory that's going to be for him.

Q: Is this your best chance since 2009?

PAUL MAINIERI: I don't know about that. We've had some pretty good teams go up there, but we didn't get to come back with much. There's seven other really good ball clubs up there along with us. We like to think we're just as good as anybody up there, but when you're playing that caliber of competition, you've got to play your best. You've got to minimize your mistakes, you've got to have a little bit of luck and you've got to pitch as well as you can. We're looking forward to the challenge and we're going to take it one game at a time, I can promise you that. I know we'll be playing Florida State in the opener, I don't know if we're playing Saturday or Sunday yet. We're going to take it one game at a time and hopefully we have success in the first game and we can look towards game two.

Q: Kramer, I know it's only been 30 minutes since the game ended, but have you changed your phone background yet?

KRAMER ROBERTSON: I have not touched my phone yet, but that will be changed before I go to sleep tonight to the national championship trophy.

PAUL MAINIERI: I hated that picture.

KRAMER ROBERTSON: I hate that picture too. I'm so glad I get to change it and never think about it again.

Q: Kramer, what was the moment like when Coach Mainieri pulled you, Greg (Deichmann) and Cole (Freeman) out in the bottom of the ninth inning?

KRAMER ROBERTSON: I was overcome with emotions. I couldn't help but think back to not too long ago in my sophomore year when I was here for the team to celebrate and go to Omaha but, unfortunately, I wasn't able to make the trip. The next day, June 8, Coach told me to pack my bags and I went home. I remember driving home and feeling like I was a failure. I was looking back on my first two years here and I just felt like I had let people down. I knew I had two decisions to make, I could make the easy decision and go somewhere else and see what happens with my career or I could gut it out and try to come back here and prove to people that I could do it. I didn't want to prove the people who said I couldn't do it right by making the easy choice. To experience that tonight is something really special to me and I'll cherish that forever.

Q: You guys are really clicking right now, do you feel like you have the physical and, maybe even more so, mental makeup to have some success up there?

PAUL MAINIERI: There's no question we have a really good ball club, we have a blend of veterans and young players that are playing with extreme confidence. Our pitching is outstanding. We have as good a chance as anybody, we just have to go out there and take it one game at a time. We'll be playing some of the best teams in the country not named LSU and it'll take our very best effort. We'll have to play as well as we can and we're going to have to have a little bit of good fortune as well.

Q: As a follow-up, is their ability to have a plan and an approach at the plate a difference maker for this club in Omaha?

PAUL MAINIERI: We always have a plan and an approach at the plate and I think Micah Gibbs deserves an awful lot of credit for the success of our team this year. He's worked long hours with these guys and they've bought in and they've executed it. I think Kramer at the top of the order along with Cole and (Antoine) Duplantis in the three hole, all that stuff has worked. It supplements everything that Greg Deichmann brings to the team. Zach Watson has really come along. I think he's improving with each passing day. I think the second half of our batting order has been outstanding. We're going to be facing the best pitching in the country this next week, so it's probably wishful thinking to think you're going to go out there and score double-digit runs every game. We don't need to score in double digits to win, we can pitch and play defense and figure out a way to score enough runs to win. That's what we're going to try and do.

Q: To the players, you spend so much energy trying to get to Omaha, is it easy to flip the switch and focus on winning a national championship?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: It's going to be a little difficult but, like Coach says, you just take it one game at a time. Whether we play Saturday or Sunday, we'll be ready and we'll get the game plan from Micah (Gibbs) and Alan Dunn will take care of the pitchers and we'll be ready to go.

KRAMER ROBERTSON: You said play for a national championship. We'll be ready to go.

CALEB GILBERT: Like they said, it's what we came here to do. I don't think there's anything out there that—

KRAMER ROBERTSON: We're not done yet. This isn't the end. We're ready to go.

Q: Getting your players to kind of flip the switch to focus on winning a national championship after expending so much effort to get to Omaha?

PAUL MAINIERI: They're not going to be focusing on winning a national championship. They're going to be focusing on beating Florida State. That's how we do it. One step at a time.

Q: Coach, I couldn't help but notice toward the end of the game I was looking at the jerseys next to you—(Sean) Ochinko, (Micah) Gibbs, (Nolan) Cain. Do you feel good when you bring guys up from the '09 team to be around these guys who are all kind of young and youthful like them to give them that confidence and that will to go up there?

PAUL MAINIERI: I think the people that like to look at the negative side of things. You know when I put Micah (Gibbs) in to be our hitting coach and Nolan (Cain) in to be our recruiting coordinator and Sean (Ochinko) came in, Nate Fury joined the staff, everybody thought I was surrounding myself with "Yes Men," you know my boys who would never disagree with me. They thought that they were not qualified to coach here because they haven't done whatever. OK? These players will tell you how qualified they are, how hard they work with them, how much they've contributed. When Kramer Robertson or Caleb Gilbert or Michael Papierski talk to Sean Ochinko, Nolan Cain or Micah Gibbs, they have one thing that these guys don't have and that's a national championship ring. They know what it takes. Other people speculate that haven't done it, but those guys know what it takes. They're young enough to relate to these kids, and I think they've had a tremendous impact on our ball club this year. I think they've all done a tremendous job. You know Alan Dunn is the best pitching coach in the country. I don't need to say anything else on him.

Q: Michael, can you describe that moment from your perspective?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: You know I came up. I was hunting a heater, and he threw a breaking ball that I took for a ball. The next pitch I banked on it being a fastball. It was, and I missed it. I look back, and (hitting coach) Micah (Gibbs) is like get it down, get on top of it. I just put a good swing on the next pitch, and it happened to be a double.

Q: How was the crowd noise, as well?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: When I was hitting I didn't hear anybody. I'm locked in on the pitcher, but when I got onto second, I heard the crowd and it was awesome to hear the best fans in college baseball.

Q: Michael, you're hitting the right way the last part of the year. What went on the right way for you the last part of the year?

MICHAEL PAPIERSKI: Like I said before, me and Micah (Gibbs) talked about putting in a leg kick to stay behind the baseball. It's helped me a lot to stay behind the baseball. The biggest thing is getting in good counts. Once you get into a good count, put a good swing on it, and after that you can't do anything about it. It's just put a good swing on the baseball and hope for the best.

Q: Kramer, those 11 runs to close the game. I think you guys only got five hits in that stretch just kind of coming through in the big situations and taking advantage of those free passes. What did you guys do to make that happen?

KRAMER ROBERTSON: We just maximized our opportunities tonight. When the opportunity to score runs presented itself, for the most part, we did a good job of cashing in on it. Obviously, Michael (Papierski) had a huge at-bat there to really ignite us. The guys before him all drew walks. Thankfully Jordan had a really tough at-bat and laid off some really tough pitches to extend the inning. Just one guy after another. Like Michael said, we got ourselves into good counts, and we didn't chase too many pitches. That's what you have to do. You have to maximize your opportunities and come through when you have a chance.

Q: Coach, for these young guys who have never experienced Omaha, how do you prepare them when they've made such an impact on this team?

PAUL MAINIERI: Look at this, Brandon. This is what it's like in Omaha. Media coverage, big crowds. They've played in front of a lot of big crowds. National television. They have played on national television. Tough teams who play in the SEC. We play all of those teams every day. The bases will be 90 feet apart. The pitcher's mound will be 60-feet, six inches. These guys will be fine. It won't be too big for anybody. They know what's at stake when you go there, but that doesn't mean that you have to try any harder or do anything differently than you've done it before. I think we are going to have a very confident, relaxed and yet aggressive team. We will get them ready this week. We will have a good week of practice. We will leave Thursday, and we are looking forward to it.

Q: Andy (Cannizaro) was talking to us before you walked in and talked of hoping that a rivalry would come up and being excited to play your program in the future. Is it good to have him back in town and playing the Mississippi State program in the future?

PAUL MAINIERI: It's been a rivalry for a long time. When Ron Polk went to Mississippi State and turned that program into what it became and, not long after that, Skip Bertman came here, it created a huge rivalry. Whether it's Ron Polk, John Cohen, Andy Cannizaro, Skip Bertman or Paul Mainieri, it's always going to be a great rivalry in college baseball because it's two schools that care deeply about the sport. They support the team, they have great facilities and great fans at both places. From my standpoint, I enjoy going to Starkville every other year and I enjoy having them here every other year. It'll continue to be a great rivalry. They'll always be good and I hope we'll continue to be too.

**2017 NCAA Baton Rouge Super Regional – Game 2
Mississippi State vs. No. 4 LSU – June 11, 2017**

LSU Head Coach Paul Mainieri

Opening Statement ...

“I think this is the first time we’ve ever held a press conference at 2:15 in the morning. I always knew that you media people are the hardest working people in the world. Thanks for hanging in there with us. Well, I just have one thing to say. Omaha get ready, because here come the Tigers. LSU nation is going to go up to Omaha, and we’re going to enjoy ourselves. Hopefully, we’re going to be there quite a while. But, I’m just so proud of this team. I’m so happy for Kramer [Robertson], and Cole [Freeman], and Jared [Poche’], and Greg [Deichmann] coming back for one more go at it, and we get to finish in Omaha, which is where everybody predicted we would be before the year. We’ve always known that everybody expected that of us, and I know sometimes at various points along the way, some people doubted that maybe we could do it. But we never lost hope, and we never lost belief that we had a team that was capable of doing it. I think what we’re doing now is what we’re supposed to be doing. We’re feeling pretty good about ourselves. I’m just so proud of our guys and so happy for all the LSU fans, and people that care for and support LSU Baseball. I’m happy for our university. I’m happy for our community. I’m happy for our state. We’re going to go up to Omaha and make you proud.”