



2016 NCAA SOFTBALL LEXINGTON REGIONAL

Saturday, May 21 | John Cropp Stadium - Lexington, Ky.

Game 5: Kentucky 3, Illinois 2 (8)

Kentucky Head Coach Rachel Lawson

Opening statement ...

"Today was a great day for us from the standpoint that it started really early this morning and this was the first time in postseason that we have played this many games in one day, I believe. I might be lying, but I don't think I am. I think this is the first time since I have been at Kentucky that we have played three games in one day. It was a real tribute to our toughness that we were able to start so early and then end the night with a win. I thought that our team fought hard and we had a great performance today on the mound. Our defense has been solid the whole time and for us to be able to get those key hits at the end, really shows how tough we are."

On if it entered her mind late in the game that this might be the seniors last game ...

"Well, it entered my mind when I made the starting lineup. So you saw everyone of our seniors play today and played in the last game in fact. I knew that we were playing great teams and this regional has been really tough from the standpoint that all four teams are playing great in all their games. I knew that for us to come out and play such a long day, we were going to have to rely on the strength of our experience and our senior class, who has been so tough for us the last four years. I kind of had a feel for that going in and if you look at the lineup, you can tell that we were going to have to do that. It crossed my mind that it might have been their last time, but hey, you have to go out with a bang, right? Katie Reed, how about that. That was awesome."

On her disagreement with the umpire late in the game ...

"No, I hadn't go my warning yet and I wanted to make sure I got my money's worth. Wait, who pays the fine? I am just kidding. I only argue when I am sure that I am correct. For me, you never want to see any player, not one of my players or another player on another team, go down because of something that I believe I saw differently. I wasn't worried about it because they always give you a warning and the nice thing about the postseason is that all the umpires have been through it before and are classy and they have to go through a lot to get to the postseason so they have pretty thick skin. I did know that after I got the warning, I was going to have to keep my mouth shut when I went back to call pitches because I didn't know if that was going to push Kelsey over the edge getting tossed her potential last game of her senior year."

On how she made her decisions to start pitchers today ...

"Well, I am confident with both of them. I thought that Meagan was throwing hard and throwing well. I don't think that her pitches matched up with the umpires strike zone very well. So I don't think that was so much an issue with Meagan, as much as it was an issue with just not being a good matchup. With that being said, I felt that Butler, who has had a lot of really big come-from-behind wins the last couple of games, I thought they would

be surprised to see Meagan come out on the mound. When there is a rain delay that usually favors the team that is losing, so I wanted to throw a monkey wrench in there so I went with Meagan. Obviously, Kelsey would be the next in line to pitch the next game, so that is just how that matched up. Then tonight, I was very confident with both of them. Had we played Butler, Kelsey was going to go out, but because we were playing Illinois, Meagan went out because Kelsey had just thrown the last game. So it was more of a focus of getting started right then after that it really doesn't matter who I throw out on the mound."

On coming back and having to beat Utah twice Sunday ...

"We have to go through the same feelings that we all just went through and hope that Katie Reed gets up and gets a big hit. I think right now the focus has to be doing a better job offensively. We really did not get our table setters on and when we did get a couple of people on we didn't do a great job on the base running side. What few opportunities we had, I felt we kind of ran ourselves out of it. I don't think that we really brought our A-game. With that said, they have great pitching and are a very good team and because they are in the Pac-12, they are battled tested. It is going to be a very difficult day, but it is going to be important to us to stay focused and stay within ourselves and do all the things that we have done to put us in this position."

On Katie Reed ...

"She hates talking about herself, so I will talk about her. She is tough. You have to be really tough to be a great ice hockey player and she is really tough. She is a great student, she's tough in the classroom, she is tough in the weight room and tough on the ball field. You are not her size and make it into the SEC and play as well as she does if you are not tough. She doesn't like to talk about herself so I will do it for her."

Kentucky Student-Athletes

#33 Kelsey Nunley, P

On what was working well for her tonight ...

"Pretty much mixing the ball around and trying to keep them off balance. Keeping the pitches low. Just trying to keep them guessing."

On Coach Lawson's message after losing to Utah ...

"Pretty much (she said) 'you have to get it done.' She talked about our running test in the fall and how it's four sets and the fourth set is the hardest one and you just literally push your body until you fall. She talked about how we have no other option. It's our last option is either to get it done or we're dead. Pretty much just put your body out there and give it all you've got. Leave it all on the field."

On if she thought back to the early days of the year and conditioning ...

"I did when she said that."



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#23 Katie Reed, 2B

On the RBI in the 7th inning to tie the game at 2-2 ...

"I was nervous because I had to. I had to get a hit. We had two outs. I wasn't really thinking anything. I had squared up on my last at bat so I felt confident going in."

On if she wanted to get it done for the seniors or if she was even thinking about that ...

"Yeah, I was thinking about it. We had them up the first three in that inning. I was hoping it would get to me so I could have that opportunity. I just didn't want it to be their last game because they're a great bunch. I don't want them to leave."

On if she relishes those types of opportunities ... "Yeah."

On if she's always been that way ...

"I would say yeah, but I think I'm more comfortable when given that opportunity now."

#10 Christian Stokes, SS

On her clutch at bats late in the game ...

"Honestly, I told myself that I was prepared for the situation. I didn't want it to be my last at-bat ever so I just did what I had to do to get on base and I trusted my teammates behind me would drive me in."

On the feeling in the dugout late in the game ...

"I think we were all nervous because we knew we were behind and we knew it could be our last at bats in our college careers. So that's never a good feeling, but all I said to the girls in the dugout was just be the one that wants to step up and be in that situation to get a good hit or whatever. I was confident that we would come back."

On how the team responded tonight ...

"I think that we showed a lot of guts. I think our resilience was really good tonight. Coming back from a deficit we really showed how much fight we have in us. That's a good thing in the post-season."

Illinois Head Coach Tyra Perry

Opening Statement ...

"We accomplished a lot by being here. To come out today and win our game against Butler in extra innings was a huge boost for the program as well. We had our opportunities tonight to beat Kentucky, which would have been a huge win over a great team and great program. We just couldn't quite hold on, but it's given us direction for the future so that we can work hard from day one, which actually starts tomorrow for our new season, so that we can find ourselves in this position again and find a way to play on Sunday."

On the team's tournament performance and pride in the team's work ...

"I just feel completely blessed to be here with this team, playing in the postseason. That was our goal from the beginning, but you know every team has that goal and you don't always get that chance. I thought we played great softball – we understood our mission and our goal and I love every single one of the players that I've coached. Our seniors will be missed as [Breanna and Nicole] mentioned, but I'm really excited about our future."

On her team's performance over the season ...

"Well, it was definitely a challenge every single day, but that's why we're – you know, that's why I do it. I can't speak for everyone else. I love the challenge of the sport and watching these young women develop. I think we saw that at the highest level this year. The returners that we have coming back, the mindset and the mentality is so exciting to me. I really wish we could get out there again immediately, but I just talked to them at the end about making sure they understand this moment, what it took to get here and then also pause to think about what it's going to take to get even further."

Illinois Student-Athletes

#20 Breanna Wonderly, P

On today's performances and season...

"When we wanted it as hard as we wanted it, the fall is hard. But we just kept fighting and I just focused on throwing my pitches and trusted Coach K and the whole team. They had my back and I couldn't ask for a better group of girls."

#40 Nicole Evans, OF

On the season and NCAA tournament performance...

"I'm not ready to leave our seniors yet. I just wanted to play pretty calm today. Like Coach [Perry] said, we just didn't get it quite done, but it opens up a lot for our future teams and our seniors have done so much to build that. Our team hasn't been here [the NCAA tournament] in a while. I know it's nice to come here and win. We know we can go farther in the future."

On the NCAA appearance and the motivation it set up moving forward ...

"I keep remembering us in our locker room over there, yelling and cheering that we were so happy to be here, but at the same time we kept saying that it's not enough to just be here. It helps us be motivated for when we're here next year, when we host next year - that it's not going to be enough to just be there. We're here to win. We're here to make a statement in this conference and in the NCAA."