

June 23, 2012



An interview with:

**ARIZONA &
SOUTH CAROLINA**

**COACH ANDY LOPEZ
COACH RAY TANNER
ALEX MEIJA
ROBERT REFSNYDER
ADAM MATTHEWS
MICHAEL ROTH**

THE MODERATOR: Let's start off with a couple of opening statements from our head coaches.

Andy, since you qualified first, why don't you start us.

COACH LOPEZ: We're excited to be invited to the Ray Tanner Invitational. (Laughter).

So, listen, obviously we're excited to be a part of this weekend. And what Ray's done, Ray and I have been friends for a long time. I have nothing but respect with what he's done at South Carolina. My God, it's an amazing thing they've done.

Really excited to be a part of it and going to try to go out and play good baseball and make it a good weekend. And, again, it will be a great moment for one program, and for the other one it should be a great moment as well. It really should.

Excited to be a part of it and real thankful we've been blessed to be a part of this thing.

THE MODERATOR: Ray?

COACH TANNER: Echo Coach Lopez's comments. We're excited to be here. And Coach Lopez and I have known each other for a long time. I have the utmost respect for him as a baseball coach and person. And normally when

we get together we have a good time, great conversation, and our teams get after it the best we can.

And he has a great club. And we're looking forward to the opportunity, and hopefully it will be a great championship series.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start by having questions directed at our student-athletes.

Q. Michael and Adam, during last night's game you guys start down 2-0. Can you kind of take us through your emotions chronologically from the beginning to the end of last night's game?

MICHAEL ROTH: It's only two runs. Baxendale threw a no-hitter through six against us the first time we faced him, so we figured it would be like that again, and we just go in the seventh inning.

So you just try not to worry too much and just keep plugging after it and keep grinding out at-bats.

ADAM MATTHEWS: Like Michael said, we haven't got much against Baxendale last couple times we faced him. So you have to keep grinding it out. And we were kind of joking around we don't ever score in the first couple innings anyway.

So they got out a couple runs ahead of us, but we just have to go up there and keep trying to get quality at-bats and try to scratch a few.

Q. Michael, you've had a lot of potential lasts in the last month, last start at home and all these times here in the postseason. What has that been sort of been like going into these recent starts, having that thought? And, also, what's on your arm? That's a sweet tattoo. (Laughter).

MICHAEL ROTH: I'll go to the starts first. Really the only one I looked at as my last start would be my last start at home. I guess every game could be my last, if you really think about it.

But you don't think about that too much.

You just try to go out there and give your team a chance to win, and that's what I try to do every time I step out on the mound.

As far as what's on my arm, it's Kinesio tape. And it's supposed to lift the skin or something, help heal faster. I don't know. Just something the trainers try to do to just help you heal, I guess.

This is where I got hit with a line drive. Hit me there and hit me in the stomach.

So it's helping me to heal faster, I guess.

Q. Is it working?

MICHAEL ROTH: I don't know. We'll see. I just liked the design.

Q. Congratulations to Arizona and South Carolina for reaching the championship. I'll direct the questions first to Robert and Alex and then to Adam and to Michael to answer. Robert and Alex, the Pac-12 prepares you a lot for this tournament. When you think about South Carolina baseball and the SEC, what comes to mind? And then of course for Adam and Michael, when you think about Arizona and Pac-12 baseball, what do you think?

ALEX MEJIA: First of all, when you think about the SEC and South Carolina, this is the third time here. So they're used to it. They've been here before. And they've been here before and they're used to everything. So we're the new team coming in. And as long as we play our game, execute our plan, do things we're supposed to do in baseball, it's going to be a great game between us two, because they seem to always do the right thing, which led them here to this point right now.

ROBERT REFSNYDER: These are the people I watched on television during summer ball. They're doing something right.

What I enjoy about SEC baseball, and especially South Carolina, they play the game of baseball right. They get after it. They try to take the extra base on the base path and play sound defense.

And what they do really well, in my opinion, offensively with two outs and a guy on second base, they do a really good job getting them in.

They just play baseball great, and I'm sure the brand of baseball they want over there. They've been executing it the past couple years.

And this is Alex and I's first trip to Omaha. I can't imagine being here three times in a row and potentially being a national champion.

It's going to be a great match-up between Pac-12 and SEC, because every day I feel like the Pac-12, and Pac-10 recently, trying to get up to the point where the SEC is today.

ADAM MATTHEWS: Arizona, the Pac-12, they play competitive baseball. They're a great conference. And, as you can tell, Arizona's done a great job of getting here, and we're honored to be able to play them. And, like they said down there, it's going to be a great matchup. Both clubs have done a great job.

And we've gotten better as the year goes on. And hopefully we can get a couple of runs, and hopefully they don't mind letting us get a couple of runs here and there.

But we're ready for the challenge ahead. And I'm sure that they are as well. And so I think it's going to be a good couple of games or few games.

MICHAEL ROTH: I can't even lie to you guys: I'm not really a fan of baseball, so I just like play the game that we play. So I don't know anything about the Pac-12. But obviously Arizona's doing a great job. They're here. They're in Omaha. And that's a great feat in itself.

And the only other thing I know about that is they've just been beating the dog crap out of people, scoring a bunch of runs. So hopefully we can pitch pretty good this series.

Q. Michael, could you address the influence of Jerry Meyers the last two years on your pitching? And, more specifically, was there anything along the way that he did to either improve your pitching, or mentally?

MICHAEL ROTH: Well, I came in with Coach Calvi as a pitching coach, great pitching coach. And then Coach Meyers came in last year. Coach Meyers really helped me with my mechanics and my front side and getting that stronger. And I think that's helped me. That's actually helped me gain some velocity and just help with some location.

Obviously it hasn't been the best at times this year. But he's really helping me focus on my mechanics and make me more sound mechanically as the year goes on. And that's a great influence.

We've slowly come -- I've gotten him to laugh a couple of times. That's kind of tough. He's pretty straight-faced. But he's a great pitching coach. And he's definitely helping me out a lot.

Q. Robert and Alex, obviously everyone in college baseball dreams of getting to the College World Series, championship series. What's it feel like to actually be here? And did you imagine yourselves here at the beginning of the year? And if you did, what do you feel now compared to what you felt back then?

ROBERT REFSNYDER: Well, you know, Omaha sometimes feels like an unattainable goal, especially when you're in like six o'clock weights and running and saying, Boy, I hope we get there, because it might be for nothing.

But unbelievable feeling. I couldn't imagine being here three years in a row.

It's cool to see a community come together for such an amazing event. And everyone's been very supportive. And cool going to restaurants, people notice who you are and things like that.

But college baseball, it's neat that we're a part of it and it's great that we're playing the best baseball of the year. And just looking forward to competing against South Carolina. It's going to be a great matchup.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think everybody in the beginning of the season kind of envisions themselves being in Omaha. That's everybody's main goal. We don't just play it to play the game. We don't play individually. We play as a team. And so everybody has that in mind.

But as the year goes on, you kind of have to learn how to win. You can't get caught up in the emotions. You can't get caught up if you lose a game. You have to learn how to bounce back.

And obviously us two teams, we've done a real good job of that. More so South Carolina, because they came from the losing bracket.

But I think we've done a good job ourselves throughout the year. We've had a couple of series where we went down. And at the end of the year we had three series, kind of overcame them and we swept the team and we came out on top in that series, and I think that helped us get where we are at today, to put us in a good position to be here in Omaha.

And to be here in Omaha, it's obviously great. The community, I've never been treated with so much respect around here before. And it's just a great feeling.

Q. Robert, you talked about watching the College World Series last year. Speak a little bit to maybe the Pac-12 and how it's

evolved the last couple of years and where you think it matches up with the SEC.

ROBERT REFSNYDER: When I went to the Cape and was talking with like my fellow teammates, and they're all over, they always joke about what's the "Pace" 10, what's the "Pace" 12? So that's kind of where I kind of realized we need to try to gain some respect nationally.

But Arizona State, they've been here a couple times. And Cal last year, that was the Cinderella story. Pretty neat story. But definitely the SEC gets a lot of notoriety and the ACC and the Big 12 and conferences like that. And sometimes on the West Coast we get lost in the scene of professional sports and entertainment and things like that.

So it's great for Arizona, I think for the West Coast and the Pac to be matched up against such a powerhouse in SEC, and hopefully it helps the Pac-12 kind of gain some momentum in the whole realm of college athletics, especially college baseball.

Q. Adam, I think you guys have been behind three games of your five in this tournament. Could you just talk about your approach to the plate, when you're behind especially in the late innings, about how you and the offensive guys go at it up there at the plate?

ADAM MATTHEWS: Obviously leading off innings, your goal is to get on base and try to get some things going behind you. That's something that we've been working hard to do.

Like you said, we've been behind a few games. With that said, you can't just give up. You have to continue to grind it out. As Coach Tanner continues to say in here and continues to tell us on the field, you just have to go out there and try and get on and hopefully get a bunt down and get a big hit.

This time of year it's about who makes the big plays, gets the bunts down and gets the clutch hits, and fortunately we've been lucky to have a few opportunities where we've scratched a couple big runs.

Q. For all four of you guys, can you kind of talk about the phenomenon that you're in the same hotel and what that's been like until now, and what do you think it will be like these next few days seeing each other as you kind of

go through this?

MICHAEL ROTH: The Hilton Hotel Battle Royale. That's the new name for it. I don't know, we've been seeing these guys all week. We've been in different brackets, haven't had to play each other.

But tons of respect for each other. And probably the worst part is at some point in this next week somebody's going to be celebrating and the other team has to hear it.

So, I mean, that's probably the only downside. And there's no free breakfast. (Laughter).

ADAM MATTHEWS: Like Michael said, it's the battle of the Hilton. The other day I was joking around and I rode the elevator with probably, what I would assume, five of their pitchers, and they were all a foot and a half taller than me. They were big boys. I never thought that obviously we'd be playing them in the championship.

And hopefully we'll have a good series, and may the best man win.

ALEX MEJIA: I think they took all the clever things to say. But just to go off what they said, obviously they're a great powerhouse in the SEC. And we want to make a name for ourselves at being Arizona. And this series is -- I think it's going to be a big one just because there's so much hype going into it. They have a chance to three-peat, and we're trying to get another one for our coach over here. It's going to be a great series.

I think these two teams play baseball to the best of their ability with anybody. So it's going to be a great series.

ROBERT REFSNYDER: Just I think we're getting outnumbered by the swimmers, though. The whole lobby smells like chlorine. (Laughter).

Like Michael said, one team's going to be happy; one team's going to be disappointed. But that's the nature of a setting like this. So looking forward to it, though.

Q. Michael and Adam, since you all room together on the road, right, and you're the two kind of main seniors on this team, when you got back to the hotel last night after accomplishing what you guys did, winning three games in two days and getting back to the championship, did you talk at all or even reflect to yourselves on how far you guys had come? Three months ago Sunday, tomorrow, was the end of that Florida series when

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obviously you guys knew some things had to change. What about that?

MICHAEL ROTH: My first comment to Adam: Do you want to order room service? We've been getting these sandwiches the past four days that have been absolutely just gnawing at our brains, and we're sick of pizza too. So we ordered room service.

But I don't think we really talked about it that much. I did say to Coach Tanner after we won last night, I was like, Can you believe we're in a position to defend our title with these knucklehead freshmen we have? And we were kind of laughing about that. (Laughter).

But we have come a long way. We have grown as a team. We have a bunch of young guys. And as an older guy, it's just nice to see how they've grown. They've kind of molded into the competitive spirit, the battling and grinding out at-bats.

And Joey Pankake came up big for us last night. We've had a bunch of freshmen do that. We wouldn't be here without them today.

ADAM MATTHEWS: Michael and I have been roommates for four years at home and on the road. And we've shared a bunch of positive and negative memories; a lot we want to forget and a lot we want to remember. So we joke about how we've been out here three times now, and it's surreal. It's something that's unbelievable; that we probably won't even think too much about it until the next couple of years.

And it's remarkable to be in this position again. And we're thankful for the opportunity. And, like Michael said, we've come a long way this year. Our freshmen are doing a good job of growing in tough situations.

And who would have thought we started 1 and 5 in the SEC and everyone was about to jump off the boat, but we weren't and we were just continuing to try to get out and continue to grind it out.

And here we are, and we're ready for this weekend and to get the series going.

MICHAEL ROTH: And getting death threats on Twitter.

ADAM MATTHEWS: I've wore it on social media in Omaha.

It's been fun. It's been funny. Me and Michael share a bunch of laughs about the fans.

Q. Adam and Michael, obviously two

years ago you guys were going into this, going for your first national championship. Did you ever imagine you'd be in the spot to defend it for possibly the third time? And what does it feel like to have that opportunity and just to be going out on this note?

MICHAEL ROTH: In the first opening ceremonies for the College World Series they tell you it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And I was out here blowing meal money like it was nothing. I'm like: Probably never going to come back.

Not that we didn't think it, but it's so tough to get here, tough road.

And it's special to have the opportunity to play here for the third year in a row. We don't take that for granted at all being here in Omaha. The atmosphere, the fans, the facilities. There's nothing better. So we love this place. There's no way we would have thought we would have been here three years in a row.

And, again, we're just happy to be here.

Q. Robert and Alex, this is a place where if you can get the crowd on your side, there's quite the edge. Do you think people of Omaha are rooting for a three-peat or the new guy?

ALEX MEJIA: I think, to be honest, we'll be rooting for these guys just cracking jokes over here. I feel I should be rooting for these guys, too.

No, you know, the fans are great out here. We both got some good support coming into this series. So I think these guys got a little bit more -- not advantage, but they have a little bit more support just because that is such a rare thing to see these days, a three-peat, especially with the new bats in play. They're trying to do something special over there.

As are we. We want to bring back a championship back to Arizona and the Pac-12. And we're just going to do our best and see what happens.

ROBERT REFSNYDER: The first day I was here I went to the Fan Fest. I went to a stand and it was crazy in there, and I think every single team T-shirt was sold out but ours. So I think I was the only one who bought one. (Laughter).

But, I mean, definitely I think, looking at a fan's perspective, just the whole story of a three-peat, I think the last time it was USC or something like that, so just amazing to be in the position they are.

So I think, as a fan, I would definitely be rooting for that, because that's an unbelievable

feat. But weird quirky fan who wants to see Arizona win, I'll take that fan, because definitely it's nice having fans here and it's nice not getting yelled at in right field with fans behind you. So hopefully Arizona fans are sitting in right field.

But I talked to a lot of Tucson natives. They're making a trip out here. It's an expensive trip, so it means a lot to Alex and I and some of the younger guys.

But it's going to be an unbelievable matchup and hopefully it will be sold out, because we're looking forward to playing some good baseball.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think the biggest predicament is going to be our hotel staff, because who are they going to cheer for?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's right.

ROBERT REFSNYDER: Our hotel staff, every time we leave the hotel, they cheer. They're going to have to pick their sides, I guess.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We'll take some swimmers. (Laughter).

THE MODERATOR: I hate to break this up, but, student-athletes, you're excused.

Questions for the coaches.

Q. Coach Lopez, you were here 20 years ago and won a title with Pepperdine. Just how has your career changed since then? How has the game changed since then and how much were you looking forward to getting back and playing for a title?

COACH LOPEZ: You're always looking to get back. By the grace of God, I've been back four other times. Three other times other than the '92 experience, twice at Florida and once other -- 2004 with my Arizona club.

To this particular weekend, no effect, in fact, I was back when -- when I rolled in -- I remember we had Fullerton, and we had three wins and no losses and they had a loss. I remember waking up that morning going: Wait a minute. If they win today, I'll have a loss and they'll have a loss, but they'll have a championship. So do we play another one in Iowa somewhere?

But I like this format. I really do. I think this is a good format. It kind of sets you up for a three-game series and you get a chance to go out and play.

How things have changed for me personally? My kids are older. Back then they were little guys hanging around my ankles. Now

I'm the ATM for my daughters and my sons are in my program and I can't get them to shave.

So things have changed quite a bit for me. But it's still an unbelievable moment.

It's not your identity. I know Ray and I are good friends and we talk about things like this. It should never be your identity.

It's a great moment. It's an unbelievable moment, a great sense of accomplishment. Ray accomplished it twice now. By the grace of God I've accomplished it once.

But life continues. It's a phenomenal moment, and you want to capture it because you work hard to capture the moment. But it never becomes your identity.

What I know of Ray Tanner is a quality human being who is a real good baseball coach. And but when it's all said and done, you want to be known as a quality human being. That's why I like him as a friend. He's a good guy.

Q. Coach Lopez, you've coached in the Southeastern Conference before obviously. Where does the Pac-12 -- where is the Pac-12 now compared to the SEC as you remember it culturally and on the field?

COACH LOPEZ: It's a different world. You're talking about a kid from LA. Not a kid anymore. An old man from LA, I guess. But I grew up in Los Angeles.

I remember -- I've said this numerous times, forgive me if I'm wearing myself out, but in '92 we got back from Omaha and 20 people from the airport and 15 were my relatives.

I mean, you're just there. And I think we were in the paper for I think a little blurb for one day because the Lakers, the Dodgers, the Angels, movie stars, the water, the ocean and the traffic and smog and on and on.

I took the job in Gainesville, Florida, and I'll never forget this, I remember going to a restaurant the first day with my wife and kids and people were asking for autographs. I remember we had a TV show and a radio show and I was like: My God, where did I go? What am I doing here?

I've said this forever. I've said it earlier. And I've joked with a couple of people in the SEC that I've seen this week from Florida, people I had good relationships with in Florida I saw earlier in the week. There's nothing like a Friday night in the SEC in baseball. I mean, there's nothing like it. And I'm saying that as a Pac-12 rat. You know, Pac-10, Pac-6, Pac-8 rat. I played at UCLA.

The SEC, it's electric. I mean, there's Starkville, Baton Rouge, Columbia, Gainesville, you name it. The Friday night in the SEC is pretty special.

In terms of baseball, when you get all of it away from it, in my team, when I got here 10 years ago, Oregon did not exist. Oregon State was trying to get to a regional. They hadn't been to a regional in 13 years.

Washington wasn't very good. UCLA was not very good. Washington State was not very good. It just -- it was down. There were three or four teams in that conference where you literally went into the week saying if we don't win two -- if we don't win two, we should all close up shop, and we should win three.

That doesn't happen anymore in the Pac-12. Which is a good thing. It's going to be good for the conference.

I never felt that in the SEC, to be real honest with you. The SEC -- Ray, you remember this, remember that one time in Birmingham, I said: What an exciting place.

COACH TANNER: And dangerous.

COACH LOPEZ: I walked into the SEC conference, said: What an exciting place to coach and, man, what a dangerous place to be.

It's a tough place to coach, it really is.

I have the utmost respect for Ray. It's really an electric place. College towns. You go into those small college towns and, man, the people are just -- this is -- I'll end on this: In the Pac, sometimes the teams are real vocal. We have a tendency to be this way, too. I'm not going to lie to you, Ray, so hang with me. Our guys are pretty vocal because you're playing at certain venues and there's 500 people, there's a thousand people max.

In the Southeastern Conference the clubs don't really say much to each other. I don't know if it's changed, Ray, but when I was there, the clubs don't -- I mean the athletes. They don't really say much to each other because there's enough going on in the fans.

It's a different environment. It's a different environment.

If you take it all away and put them in a field somewhere, good baseball in the Pac. Good baseball in the SEC. Good athletes. For every Will Clark and his guys that have come out and are in the Big Leagues now, then you've got the Tim Lincecum and all the rest that have come out of

the Pac, too, real good baseball. Different culture. Different culture, but unbelievably good baseball.

Q. Andy, both your guys mentioned specifically that South Carolina has been here three times. They know the deal. If that's an advantage, how do you make sure it's not too big of an advantage Sunday when you guys get out there the first time? And, Ray, how challenging will it be to get those two guys to loosen up a little bit?

COACH TANNER: You know, the thing about the situation -- and we've been here and we've had some good fortune here. I don't think it's an advantage for us.

I hate to try to give you coach-speak, but we're probably the underdog. We've been through the losers bracket. We've played a couple extra games. And these guys are scoring 10 or 12 runs a game. They're just an offensive juggernaut. So we've got our work cut out for us.

And I think Robert and Alex said it best. This is about two teams just trying to play baseball, having a good time and doing the best you can.

And I think both clubs respect the game, respect each other, and that's what it's going to be about.

Maybe they have the advantage because of their offensive prowess. And so we'll see. We'll see if we can step up on the mound and keep things interesting.

COACH LOPEZ: For us, this is my 36th year as a head coach; five at the high school level and 30 at the college level. I've been really fortunate. I started at the high school, went to Division II, Pepperdine and Florida and now here.

So the old saying that an old dog can't learn new tricks, I mean, a picture is worth a thousand words. Just take a picture of me. I just really believe you get your guys ready to play good baseball every day at practice.

I literally make my pitchers describe to me what good baseball is in terms of the definition of it. I literally make our hitters describe what good baseball is in terms of the definition of a good at-bat. I make the position guys describe to me what good baseball is in terms of communicating on defense, not being selfish and keeping your mouth quiet, but communicating on defense.

And then I basically tell them two things. We do a lot of this. But I tell them two things: Practices belong to me; games belong to you.

Ray and I -- we're not going to play. If we do, it's going to be a nightmare. We're not going to play.

These young guys are going to go out and hopefully execute good baseball. And if they do that, then it's a strange game. You're on offense. You don't have the ball. It's a round object against a round object.

If you play good baseball, usually end up with pretty good results. So that's all we'll continue to talk about. That's what we talked about since the day they've gotten here. And it's easy for me because I don't have to remember it I say it so often: Just go out and play good baseball, and things will work it out.

Q. Ray, when you have a couple of guys who are as uptight as Adam and Michael, as your team leaders, how much does that help kind of get you guys through this season and deal with any of the historical significance of this season?

COACH TANNER: I think it's huge. I said before, as we became a better club during the season, especially the second half, I gave all the credit to the veteran players.

I've tried to change over the years. I'm sort of an old-school coach. And I've tried to adjust to a different society or mentality of student-athletes. But dating back, I was sort of old school. And I was kind of tough and no nonsense and no laughs and smiles, those kind of things.

Over the years I've tried to make adjustments and let the guys have a good time as long as they play hard and respect the game.

From day one Michael Roth has been exactly what you see. And when he tells you that he's not a baseball fan, I doubt he's watched any baseball since he's been here except the games we've been involved in. That's just who he is.

And Adam was a lot more serious as a freshman, but he became roommates with Michael. So it took him awhile. But Michael got the best of him. He listened to Michael instead of me. So he made the adjustment.

But those guys, they have a good time. I saw a picture one night. We were on the road somewhere. We do curfew. And one of my coaches came back and he said, I don't know if I should tell you this, but Michael and Adam were in the bathtub together when I checked the room. And I said, I wish you hadn't told me that.

(Laughter).

Of course they just did it just because they'd get some attention out of the thing. That's the way Michael is. He just has a good time.

The young man is an absolute genius academically. He's a strong Christian. He works extremely hard. He is a good player.

A couple of days ago the Peters family, who we're friends with here in Omaha, they have -- as you may know, they have nine children. And one of the younger daughters, May, is tight with Michael.

And my daughter, who is six, told me that May has a date with Michael Roth at the yogurt store. And I said, What? She said, May has a date. They're having yogurt together.

And, lo and behold, I gotta research this. I wanted to make sure that May's mom was going to be in attendance.

But that's how he is and who he is. And these guys have been a great influence on the younger players. Because I think I probably set the younger guys back in the beginning. I think there's an initiation that you have to go through as a young player. I gotta teach them the game in the fall.

And I tell them that don't get upset with my coaching style, just understand that I care about you. You're important to me. But I'm going to try to make some points in the fall.

So I think I set them back a little bit. You're talking about recruiting student-athletes that feel good about themselves, get yelled at a little bit, their mistakes get emphasized, so they took two steps back and one step forward.

But having these guys around, you're going to be fine. You're going through this. This is a process. It will pay dividends for you, just keep hanging in there. And then you get to the season, like Coach Lopez said, it's your time now. Go play and I'll be a cheerleader the best I can.

The hardest thing for young players is handling the adversity, the respect in the game, the bad at-bats, the bad pitches, the bad defensive plays, letting it go quick enough. That's the hardest thing for any baseball player, but especially for any young player. And these guys are great at that. They've learned to let it go and try to go forward. You got eyes in the front of your head, not behind you.

So they've done a great job helping our young guys.

Q. Ray, you have probably a better appreciation than most of how difficult it is to get to this point. So I'm wondering your thoughts on what Andy's been able to do and get a third team back here and in contention.

COACH TANNER: You know, for a long time I coached and I would never come to Omaha. I didn't want to be in attendance unless I came with a team.

And I guess the first time it happened was back in '02. And Coach Lopez has been a great coach from day one. This is his third different program to the College World Series. And I've learned so much from him, his days in the SEC at Florida.

As he said we sometimes get wrapped up in our professions. As you do. And every opportunity I had to chat with him, you know, he's a guy that can put it in perspective for you.

We're trying to do the best we can. But it is still a game. And these are amateur athletes, and we're doing the best we can. And that's really what it's all about.

I think this whole stage is wonderful. Omaha is a very special place for all of us. But at the end of the day you try to do things for the right reasons and play the game, respect it, make it a good experience.

And regardless of what happens in our series, I think this is the right -- this is the right way.

You heard his players talk and how classy they are and how his program is. And I think it's great.

We're going to have two really good teams going at each other. And I know somebody's going to lose, but it will be a great series.

Q. With all the innings that your starters have pitched this year, have you had to scale back or make any concessions to the work that they've done between starts in a way to try to keep their arms fresh, and how are they going into this week?

COACH LOPEZ: The last question, I'll answer the last part of your question first. They're okay. They're ready to go. I mean, Kurt Heyer -- Kurt's like -- it's ironic. Talking about Michael, Kurt Heyer is an impersonator, our starting pitcher, does a marvelous job of our athletic director, Greg Byrne, just classic, and does a pretty good job of me, too. He keeps me on my edge, too, and does it on every road trip, gets the microphone on the

bus and entertains the club when we land in any town. So kind of unique, hearing about Michael. And obviously very competitive, like Michael.

Just two really good college pitchers that like to compete and marquee guys, your Friday night guys.

We scaled back. We did. We shut down the amount of pitches they throw in their pens in between. We do what you have to do.

Ray's done a marvelous job. I've seen him grow at that program in South Carolina. I remember my first year in the SEC we went down there, it was a nice facility, but now, as I joke with him, why go to Birmingham? Just play the SEC tournament in Columbia. It's a great facility.

But you do what you have to do. And we've had to do that this year. We've had to -- our pen -- to nobody's fault -- nobody's fault, I'll take full responsibility for it, our pen hasn't been as strong and as spectacular as I would like for it to be.

I joked with somebody earlier in 2008 I thought I had a club that could come here, win a national title. We went on the road to Michigan as a 1 seed, they flew us home to Tucson and then flew us across the country to Miami, and we got beat on Sunday in the Super Regional championship game 2-1. We had two first-round pitchers in the sixth and seventh and eighth inning.

So back then I used to tell our starters just get five and then grab a towel, some Gatorade and wave it for the next four innings as these guys are coming in. And we didn't lose. We didn't lose a game that year from the sixth inning on.

Now, as I told our starters about five weeks in the season, I'll come out and talk to you, but I'm just going to ask you what the weather is like on the mound and what it's like in the dugout. Because I'm going back in, and when it's 125, -30 pitches, then I'll come out and make a pitching change.

But we've had to make a small adjustment on the amount of pitches they've thrown mid-week, but they're fine. They're ready to go.

Adrenalin is key. You could ask any college pitcher in America would you throw on two days' rest if you had a chance to throw for a national title, and I don't think there'd be one guy that would look at you and say, yeah, I'll go on one day if I have to.

They're ready to go.

Q. Ray, can you just kind of big picture here talk about how hard it is to keep this



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going, to be here three years in a row, and nobody else -- you have a chance to do something that nobody's done in the sport in almost 40 years now. In this day and age with the competition you face and the league you're in and everybody's shooting for you?

COACH TANNER: I think the key is just you just can't allow yourself to get into that mode. I know we had a pretty good streak going in the postseason until Arkansas got us a few days ago.

But we were never really there, with the players and the coaches. It's not part of the conversation, and it's not even like you're just trying to avoid it. It's not like you just block it out and say we can't talk about it.

You really can't allow yourself to go there. You just try to play the next game. And I've said before, we've got a pretty good team. But we're not -- we're not the 27 Yankees. I mean, we've had 28 one-run games.

We know every at-bat, every inning is going to be crucial. If we play well, were going to be in a close game. I said to the guys many times going into the sixth, seventh, eighth inning, if we're down by two or three, we've got a crack at it. That's kind of how we played.

So we don't get into that position, this is our third trip in a row, a chance to play in the finals for the third year. It's just hard to wrap your arms around that. It really is. It's so hard to get here to begin with.

And then to have some success and going through the Pac or the SEC, so many good teams, you just have to have some good luck, some good fortune along the way, and a couple of clutch performances.

So, in short, we just haven't been in that element that you think about anything and you just go play and hope for the best that particular day.

Q. Coach Lopez, can you talk about the development of your freshmen? I think you've got five or six position players and pitchers who have really developed. We've heard about South Carolina, but I'm curious about yours.

COACH LOPEZ: It's probably been the most pleasant thing this year, to be real honest with you. I was confident that the junior class would be pretty good. They showed that their freshman year.

I hate to belittle it, I want to thank my administration, specifically Greg Byrne. He had a

vision to move us from Suncet, and it was a little bit of a controversial move.

I don't know about Greg, but I got a couple of choice e-mails when we made the move. But it was a great vision on his part. And it allowed these guys -- again, I'm forever thankful for Greg from the standpoint he had a vision of moving us to Hi Corbett. Not an easy move. You're from Tucson. You know what I'm talking about.

But you know what, I'm not sure these guys would be here today if we don't do that. And I'm being honest. I have one of my can ex-players from 2008 at our practice yesterday.

He came to Omaha to come see the Series. Ryan, you saw him, Colt Sedbrook. That was a good team. I'm not sure I'll ever coach a team like that with that kind of pitching again. I hope I do. But that was a good team. And I apologized to him yesterday. I said: Colt, you know what, I'm sorry, I'm sorry you didn't experience this as a player.

That was the first recruiting class I ever had that didn't get to Omaha. And that's a setback for me in terms of I want to get my guys here and let them have this experience.

I'm thankful that they bring me here, but I want to get them here, try to get them here.

I just think that the freshmen have had a great opportunity because we've moved to Hi Corbett. They've played in front of great crowds. They've heard the U of A chants going on. I've heard them. It's been a neat thing. It's been a great experience in Tucson for us.

I think they've developed because of that environment. And I mean that sincerely. I think they developed. I never worried about the junior class. I didn't. They've proven their wear to me, personally on and off the field.

The freshmen, I think, have gotten better and been able to produce in big postseason roles and in College World Series because they've had an experience of being in front of 5,000 people against Arizona State and 5,000 people against Stanford and things like that.

And so, again, I'm really thankful that Greg Byrne came here, or came to Tucson, and had the vision to say: Let's get over there, let's see what this is all about. And I mean it's been a great move for us.

Q. Coach Tanner, obviously your pitching staff has been excellent throughout this year. But how do you prepare them to play a team like Arizona where you don't get any

breaks throughout their entire batting order with eight guys batting over .300?

COACH TANNER: Well, last night after the game, was a late night, got a quick shower and a slice of pepperoni pizza and here comes Andrew Kitick with the Arizona stats. I said: Andrew, can I just get through one piece of pizza. He said: They're hitting .330. He said: There's no easy outs in that lineup.

I started going through it, and obviously didn't get much sleep after that. But they're really good. I started watching them. We had a chance in the Regionals when they were televised and I got a chance to see them play there, and we're playing Louisville, and they're shooting balls in both alleys.

And I've been to Hi Corbett. It's a big yard. Hard to get it out of there. But their plate discipline is incredible. Making all the plays.

Alex is fun to watch. And Robert -- and it's a challenge. It's a difficult challenge. We're not sure exactly who we're going to start tomorrow.

Most of the time I'll get a guy or two that kind of gets to me and says I really want the ball. But since they've watched these guys hit, I'm not getting those guys. They're avoiding me. All the pitchers are going in a different direction.

But that's what it is. I mean, they're really good. And they've pitched well, too. But they probably swing the bats better than anybody or have been for a while. So it's going to be one of those deals that I don't know that we can slow them down.

You hope to get a couple balls hit at us, and maybe a double play ball or something. But they're really, really good. We're going to have to be as good as we've been. We've pitched really well to get back into this position. And we're going to have to have a couple of guys that haven't maybe been on the mound yet to pitch really well.

Q. Coach Tanner, could you address how the pitching rotation is kind of shaping up. I know you had some thoughts last night. Any changes from what you thought then?

COACH TANNER: Not yet. Like I said, we haven't settled. We'll probably try to nail down somebody by the end of the afternoon.

I'm not exactly sure what we're going to do. Coach Meyers will make a suggestion. And more than likely I'll go with it based on the way he feels about things and after doing a little bit of

scouting work on the Wildcats, we'll see. And if Roth feels good enough, then he'll probably get back out there on three days, but we haven't gone there either.

So we'll just have to wait and see. I've been kidding Coach Lopez, we're in the same hotel and I see him occasionally. And I see his wife very early coming down for coffee. He's still asleep. But she and I -- she and I are bonding. (Laughter) and so who knows. It's going to be a great challenge.

COACH LOPEZ: My daughter last night, I'm sitting there watching the game, my daughter comes in -- I've got two daughters. My 24-year-old daughter is a seminary student.

So she said: Dad, who do you want to win? I said: I don't really care, Carrie. Her name is Carrie. I said: I don't care. She said: I'm rooting for South Carolina. I said: You are? Tell your wife this. I said: You are?

She said: Yes. I'm meeting with Coach Tanner's staff. They've got 11 kids among their coaching staff. I love that coaching staff. I want that coaching staff to win. I want them to stick around a few more days. So you got my daughter won there.

COACH TANNER: She knows we're easy. By the way, I got, Coach, one of the players in the elevator with me. He and I had a conversation. And he gave me the rooming list. So that's my tactic tonight. I gotta do the best I can to even up the table here.

COACH LOPEZ: Start picking us off.

Q. Coach Lopez, the same question, what's your planned pitching rotation?

COACH LOPEZ: We'll go Connor Wade to open up the series. Connor been off for a little bit, been about five days. And we'll open with Connor.

And to be very candid, we'll go TBA from that point. Obviously we can bring Kurt back on four days' rest. So if we have to we can bring him back.

I want to see how he feels in the next couple of days too. And James Farris, I think he threw an inner squad in January. That's the last time I remember seeing James Farris throw. It's been a while. He's more than ready to go. If anything, I'm more concerned that he hasn't been active.

It's a blessing and a curse that we've won three games and we've been off for three weeks. And Ray's played 15 games in the last three days.

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So there's good and bad in that I think in some respects. But he'll be ready to go, too. So we'll go Connor Wade and kind of see where we're at.

Q. With the move to Hi Corbett, and there were renewed expectations, let's say, was there ever -- did you ever feel the pressure to win this season more so than in previous years?

COACH LOPEZ: No, not to win, Ryan, as much as to get people to the field.

And you and I have been together for the time I've been there, and, like I said, listen, I'm really proud of this group. I'm so proud of these guys. I'm so happy for them. Ray knows this. He's had the moments that you dream about as a coach having a group of young guys -- as he mentioned earlier, sometimes our coaching technique is very similar.

It gets a little loud, that would be a nice way -- it gets a little loud on the field. You see the stare in their eyes this is the guy that recruited me loved me and smiled at me and laughed at me now he's upset with me.

And it's such a blessing to see them here and see them work out and see them in the dugout. And see them in the hotel and see them walking to Zesto's and things like that.

'08 is the heartache for me. First recruiting class that never went to Omaha for me. From Pepperdine all the way to Florida to here, the only class I see and I think: Gosh, I didn't get them there.

So for me, when we moved to Hi Corbett, I honestly thought the '04 group came here, the '05 group was better in fact, a year older, juniors.

We go to Fullerton, 1 seed. We have to face Scherzer for the Tigers the first night. Next night we face Ramiro from Fullerton.

That was our reward for being a 1 seed. We beat them both but we were so worn out, couldn't get out of it. In '08, and '07, we were 1 seed.

I didn't feel the pressure to win. I just felt the pressure that people would come and watch -- not me. I don't even coach the baselines, I'm sitting in the dugout trying to avoid people. Come on.

You know, my rule with Blair. Blair, I don't want to be on a media guide or poster, I don't want to be on anything, just leave me alone and let these guys be -- but I wanted them to come out

and watch good college players.

One of the heartaches I've had at Arizona, 2004 we were in the College World Series. And seven of those guys were in the Big Leagues at one time. You know that. And we were getting, what, 500 people at a game.

So I never felt the pressure of winning. I feel that pressure no matter. I felt that as a high school coach. I want to win. He wants to win. We both want to win this weekend.

You wake up with that, don't you, Ray? Yeah, you wake up with that. You go to bed with that. I want to win. Who doesn't. But I was just hoping that people would show up and watch Alex Mejia play shortstop, and show up and watch Joey Rickert play ball, play center field. And watch Kurt Heyer, as goofy as he is, throw strikes.

By the grace of God, like I said, an athletic director with a vision, they showed up. And so hopefully it will continue.

Q. Coach Lopez, as you watch what South Carolina has done over the past three seasons, always able to overcome any situation or difficulty, and continue to win, what do you see as the one trait or characteristic that allows them to do that?

COACH LOPEZ: Coach Tanner. That's the right thing to say; he's sitting right next to me.

COACH TANNER: That's okay.

COACH LOPEZ: Coach Tanner. Ray and I said, they put us way off we were the lower seeds in the SEC. One year we were in the hotel, we weren't in the nice one in Birmingham. Remember we sat out there?

COACH TANNER: Out on the lake. It was bad.

COACH LOPEZ: And we talked, remember that? We talked about profession and we talked -- at the time you couldn't have kids at the time. We talked about life.

Ray, we talked about life. We talked about keeping this in perspective. We talked about all the things that we don't get a chance to talk about a lot about. Because, believe it or not, we have lives. We don't go in a closet.

I tell my athletes all the time, hey, believe it or not, I don't go home and get in a closet, my wife shoves food under the door and I show up the next day: Come on, what are we doing? Let's get the bunt defense ready. I have a life. I have a life.

Leadership at the top. It really is. Leadership at the top. I mean, Ray's done a marvelous job. Ray is as good as there is in the

country in coaching college baseball. You people in Columbia are very fortunate to have Ray Tanner as your baseball coach at the University of South Carolina.

You're very fortunate to have Ray Tanner as your baseball coach. You really are. He's not only a great coach, he's a great human being, and I've always believed that a team reflects their head coach. I believe that.

I heard John Wooden say that. I was a young grad assistant in 1975, and I heard John Wooden say that, right in my presence. He said: Your team will represent who you are on and off the field.

And I'll believe that forever. And that's why I said he's done a marvelous job.

COACH TANNER: See, he reflects ahead. My team gets two runs a game, that's the way I hit. His team, his team gets ten. They're a reflection of the way he hits.

COACH LOPEZ: Go look at the numbers, I was a defensive shortstop, man.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck, guys.

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