

## Piling on



BILL FEIG/AP

LSU's Leon Landry leaps on top of the pile during the postgame celebration at the super regional game at Alex Box Stadium on Saturday.

Super Regional Baseball Photos:

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/photos/sports/47133367.html>

## Tigers beat Rice, move on to CWS

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/sports/47135287.html>

- By [RANDY ROSETTA](#)
- Advocate sportswriter
- Published: Jun 7, 2009

Old and new, young and old collided for the tradition-steeped LSU baseball program this season, with the introduction of a new \$35-million stadium providing a major bridge from a glorious past to a new wave of sky-high expectations.

On Saturday, the Tigers penned another meaningful chapter of the program's new beginnings, and the script sure looked awfully familiar.

Familiar as in how LSU has won so many times this season.

Familiar as in what unfolded after the Tigers punched another ticket to a place that has become a June home so often for them and their fans.

As different as the new Alex Box Stadium might look and seem from its cozy older namesake, the new joint sure took on a recognizable appearance in the aftermath of LSU's 5-3 triumph against Rice that locked up a super regional victory.

Another delirious victory lap, more hand-slapping between the happy players and an adoring crowd, Mardi Gras beads in abundance and a celebration just getting revved up.

The Tigers are headed back to Omaha, Neb., for the 2009 College World Series, and LSU fans know how to mark that occasion pretty well.

“Omaha, here come the Tigers,” LSU coach Paul Mainieri said after an on-field celebration finally wound down. “We’re going up there with seven great ball clubs. I figure one team has to win it, so it might as well be us.”

No. 1-ranked LSU (51-16) will head north with the most wins in the country and as one of the hottest teams, with a season-long 10-game winning streak after dispatching of the Owls (43-18) in two games.

To reach the CWS for a 15th time, the Tigers had to grind out a hard-fought win by following a recipe that has worked so well this season.

LSU’s bats weren’t explosive and there were opportunities missed that could have made breathing much easier for the record crowd of 9,651.

But the Tigers manufactured a pair of runs on outs when they could, got another one on a wild pitch and received a huge boost from senior Derek Helenihi’s two RBIs.

And two of the three pitchers who have anchored LSU’s success all along were at the heart of the matter.

Senior Louis Coleman went eight innings, battling a feisty Rice lineup without his best stuff. He limited the Owls to three runs despite retiring them in order just once.

When it came time to get the final three outs, Mainieri turned the ball over to his unflappable freshman closer, Matty Ott, and for a school-record 16th time Ott came through with the save.

True to form, Ott injected a small measure of drama when he hit Ryan Lewis with a pitch to bring the tying run to the plate in the red-hot bat of leadoff hitter Brock Holt — who had three hits, including a home run Saturday.

Ott and Holt waged an intense battle to a 2-2 count before Ott turned to his signature slider to slam the door with a strikeout and trigger a familiar dog pile in the center of the diamond.

“Once I got two strikes, I went right at him, because I wasn’t going to let him beat us,” said Ott, who slammed his glove down on the mound as catcher Micah Gibbs bear-hugged him before the pile commenced. “I saw him swing and miss, and I blinked and didn’t believe it at first and then it hit me.”

Without a big offensive inning, the Tigers chipped away with single runs in the first, fourth and sixth innings and two in the fifth when they took the lead for good, 4-2.

Second baseman DJ LeMahieu opened the first inning with a double to right field and came home on Mikie Mahtook's bases-loaded chopper to shortstop.

Jared Mitchell blooped a leadoff double to left in the fourth and advanced a base at a time when Sean Ochinko ripped a single to left and Helenihi rolled a hit through the middle that trickled through for an RBI single.

After Rice twice forged a tie (1-1, 2-2), LSU inched in front for good in the fifth.

Owls starter Ryan Berry — who grappled with command in his five-inning stint — walked Ryan Schimpf on four pitches but jumped ahead of LSU slugger Blake Dean 0-2. Dean worked his way back even in the count and then rammed a double to left-center that put runners on second and third with no outs.

Gibbs punched a ball past Berry to Brock at second base that was slow enough to score Schimpf with the go-ahead run. Moments later, Dean sprinted home on a two-out, two-strike wild pitch.

Helenihi supplied a little more breathing room in the sixth, when he bashed an opposite field homer off Berry on a 3-and-1 count.

"I felt like we were one or two swings away from just blowing the game open right away," Mainieri said. "We didn't quite get that hit that we needed and we let them stay around.

"The big hit of the game was Blake Dean's double. ... We were able to get both runners across on a groundout and a wild pitch and it got us the lead there before Derek added the extra run."

The Tigers couldn't scratch anything else out after Rice reliever Jared Rogers took over for Berry and logged four scoreless innings. But Coleman and Ott made sure those five runs were enough.

Coleman didn't overpower the Owls, even after they lost freshman sensation Anthony Rendon to a leg injury when he collided with a teammate chasing down a foul ball in the second inning.

Rice kept threatening, but like LSU, never managed to unload a big inning.

Holt and Diego Seastrunk touched up Coleman for solo home runs and Michael Fuda's squeeze bunt brought Seastrunk home in the fourth.

Instead, Coleman simply got outs when he had to and pitched around trouble all day on the way to his 13th victory.

"This is why I came back," said Coleman who passed up a chance to turn pro after getting drafted in the 14th round of the 2008 Major League draft. "This is where I wanted to be. I wouldn't have had it any other way."

Likewise, it was fitting that Ott on the hill to provide the final nails.

The freshman right-hander was limited this weekend after experiencing tightness in his throwing shoulder after he saved the Tigers' 3-2 win over Baylor last Saturday.

When the time came, though, Ott was right where he wanted to be.

“This was unbelievable,” Ott said. “In the SEC you face situations like that all the time, but none of them meant as much as this one. I’ve prepared for this moment all season long and I’m glad the coaches gave me the opportunity to be out there.

“All I had to do was go out and get the last three outs, and I wasn’t going to let that slip through my fingers.”

Mainieri knew that when he woke up Saturday morning and visualized what the perfect situation was for his team.

“This was a perfect scenario,” Mainieri said. “Coleman gave us eight and normally I’m a nervous wreck when we’re the visiting team, but Matty Ott gives me a lot of confidence we can close a team out.”

Confidence was a theme all season for LSU after the Tigers began the season ranked No. 1 in two polls and were projected by anybody with an opinion as a national championship contender.

So when fate came to fruition Saturday, Mainieri didn’t back down. He talked about telling his team before the season what it could achieve and letting them know where this season was destined to wind up.

“They trusted me. They did the things myself and the coaches told them they needed to do. We had players do extraordinary things at times, and they pulled together as a group and just had the determination to get there,” Mainieri said. “We very much expected to be making an airplane trip to Omaha come Thursday.”

## **SUPER REGIONAL UPDATE**

**Rice (43-18) at LSU (51-16)**

**Friday:** LSU 12, Rice 9

**Saturday:** LSU 5, Rice 3

**Up next:** The Tigers advance to the 2009 College World Series in Omaha, Neb., and will face either Ole Miss or Virginia in the opening round next Saturday.