

## VICTORY!

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### LSU routs Texas 11-4 for sixth College World Series title

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OMAHA, Neb. — Nine years ago, most of the players on LSU's current roster were still just young boys whose baseball futures were only beginning to take shape on baseball diamonds all over Louisiana as well as in corners as far away as New Jersey, Michigan, California and Florida.

For many of them, watching the mighty Tigers carve out their place as college baseball's dynasty of the '90s was central to what they wanted to do someday.

At the heart of their baseball dreams.

Sometimes, dreams come true.

Sometime arrived in style Wednesday night, when LSU surged past Texas 11-4 at Rosenblatt Stadium to win the College World Series.

The championship is the Tigers' sixth, their first since 2000. A nine-year drought that gave some new aspirations a chance to percolate.

"It's an unbelievable feeling to be put in a position where in Baton Rouge you're remembered forever," LSU right fielder Jared Mitchell said. He and Chad Jones already possess national championship rings in football from the Tigers' 2007 BCS national championship in football.

"We put LSU baseball back on top where it belongs and for years to come, and to be a part of that is something special."

To get back to the top, LSU (56-17) got contributions up and down the lineup to knock off Texas (50-16-1) as the Tigers won the best-of-three championship series.

Mitchell, named the CWS Most Outstanding Player, got his college swan song started in rousing fashion with a three-run, two-out, first-inning home run.

Tough-as-nails pitcher Anthony Ranaudo gutted out 5 1/3 innings on short rest and battled as long as he possibly could to keep LSU in front.

When the Longhorns threatened to snatch momentum away, freshman center fielder Mikie Mahtook came through in the clutch again and then Sean Ochinko stuck a dagger in Texas' heart with a two-out, two-run single.

And in the most fitting of endings, senior Louis Coleman — LSU’s unquestionable heart-and-soul — struck out the side in the bottom of the ninth inning to ignite a wild celebration in the middle of a Rosenblatt diamond that has been so kind to the Tigers through the years.

Coleman launched his glove in the air and braced for a bear hug from catcher Micah Gibbs as the LSU players converged on the mound. Paul Mainieri shared the moment in a long hug in front of the dugout with sons Nick and Tommy. Then, he found his 80-year-old father and mentor, Demie “Doc” Mainieri, as quickly as he could.

“I’ve dreamt my whole life of having this moment after the game to be able to talk about a national championship, and now it’s here. It’s almost surreal,” said Mainieri, who guided the Tigers to the national crown in his third season.

“I’m filled with so many different emotions right now. But all I could think about during the ninth inning was my father. I’m just so happy he could be here to share it with us. But I’ll tell you, I’m so proud to be the coach at LSU and represent that great state and all the great people in that state and a wonderful university.

“And all I could think about that was these wonderful kids I’ve had a chance to coach. ... I’m so happy for these kids — they’ve done everything you ask them to do, and they’re great kids, and they deserve it.”

There was the customary victory lap and the sought-after national championship hardware was distributed, but the celebration was only getting started.

Because after nine years of waiting, the Tigers are back on top — the champions of college baseball again. And a new corps of little boys has a new set of heroes and a new set of dreams to hatch.

“If there’s a better way, you write the story for me,” Mitchell said when asked if the ending to the season was as good as he could’ve expected. “I can’t explain it. It’s been so much fun with these guys who I really care about to really come together the way we did.”

No. 1-ranked LSU danced with destiny all season long and did so with nearly perfect rhythm.

The Tigers began the season ranked No. 1 in two major polls, stayed in the top 10 of every ranking throughout the season, battled through the grinding Southeastern Conference to tie for the regular-season championship and then stormed back to win the league tournament.

LSU then blazed through NCAA regional and super regional play unbeaten and won three games in Omaha to get to the CWS finals without a hiccup.

Texas had the Tigers beat in the championship series opener, but DJ LeMahieu gave LSU life with a two-out, two-run ninth inning double and Mahtook drove in the game-winner two innings later.

The ’Horns finally wobbled the Tigers with a 5-1 victory Tuesday to force the decisive third meeting, but that wasn’t enough to separate LSU from what it wanted to accomplish.

Not even close.

Wednesday's victory fulfilled destiny's call by pulling together all the strands of success the Tigers have relied on all season long.

Ranaudo's grit was at the heart of the triumph. He labored through his stint, at times showing flashes of brilliance that helped him win 12 games, at others reaching down deep to find whatever he could muster.

"I knew he was going to give us a chance," Ochinko said. "I put my head on my pillow last night knowing that Anthony Ranaudo was going to get it done for us."

Jones, known more as a football safety, amplified the element he has added since his late-season emergence as a left-handed reliever out of the bullpen with 1 2/3 innings of scoreless relief that bridged the gap to Coleman.

Together, those two capped a magical final series by the bullpen: only three runs allowed in 15 2/3 innings.

Ochinko swung the bat like he did early in the season when he helped carry the offense. He went 4-for-5 Wednesday with a monstrous exclamation-point home run in the ninth inning after he singled three times, none bigger than a two-out, two-run single in the sixth inning.

After the feisty 'Horns drew even at 4-4 in the bottom of the fifth, the Tigers clawed back in front in the top of the sixth by erupting for five runs.

Mitchell continued a memorable championship day by beginning the inning by working Texas reliever Brandon Workman for a full-count walk. That snapped Workman's streak of nine hitters in a row mowed down and seemed to rattle him.

UT catcher Cameron Rupp got handcuffed on a pitch that got away from him for a passed ball that allowed Mitchell to scamper to second with nobody out. Mahtook delivered his second big hit against Workman in the finals when he rifled a double to right-center to plate Mitchell with the go-ahead run.

As he reached second base, Mahtook pumped both fists.

"I didn't have great at-bats my first three," Mahtook said. "He threw me a fastball and I got it in the gap. Like they say, I play with a football mentality, and I just showed my emotions on second base."

Gibbs laid down a perfect bunt to move Mahtook to third and UT reliever Austin Dicharry's throw to first base was off the mark, allowing Gibbs to reach safely. Derek Helenihi cranked a deep fly ball to left field to score Mahtook for a 6-4 advantage, but LSU wasn't finished.

Dicharry got Austin Nola on a groundout but walked LeMahieu on four pitches. Austin Wood took over and couldn't get the door shut. He hit Ryan Schimpf and Blake Dean with pitches back-to-back to force in a run.

Then, on his first pitch to Ochinko, the first baseman rammed a single to left field to score LeMahieu and Schimpf for a 9-4 LSU lead.

“Got to two outs and we were in pretty good shape and then the wheels fell off the car,” legendary Texas coach Augie Garrido said. “We walked people, hit people and they kept the rally going by capitalizing on our mistakes. And then they added to it.

“Once they smelled the blood in the water, I think they did what they should do and really put us away.”

Things started with a dramatic shot in the arm for LSU when Mitchell wrapped a three-run home run around the right-field foul pole with two outs to give the Tigers an immediate lead and their earliest of the CWS finals.

Though buoyed by the quick advantage, Ranaudo wasn't sharp like he has been most of the season, and the Longhorns got to him to cut the deficit in half in the third inning.

Travis Tucker laced a leadoff double into the left-field corner and Ranaudo walked Brandon Belt. Those two worked a double steal with one out and Tucker came home on a groundout.

With two outs Ranaudo walked three straight hitters, with Preston Clark forcing in a run when he won a 10-pitch battle with Ranaudo for an RBI walk.

The Longhorns erased LSU's lead in the fifth inning on Kevin Keyes' prodigious two-run blast into a section of left-center field bleachers populated by burnt orange-clad Longhorns fans.

That knotted the score 4-4 and allowed Texas to hit the reset button and turn the game into a four-inning battle for the championship.

LSU won that abbreviated showdown by scoring the final seven runs.

“They did the thing they needed to do to beat us twice,” Garrido said. “They are the best team we faced this season. By far.”

Best is what these Tigers will always be known as in 2009. Which means it's time for new dreams.