Dan McDonnell
Luke Smith
Justin Lavey
Louisville Cardinals

Vanderbilt - 3, Louisville - 2

DAN MCDONNELL: Congratulate Vanderbilt. It's a really good team. They play clean. They make you earn it. It wasn't easy to score off them the two times we played them. So they get to move on.

But I really want to focus on our team, our effort, and how much fun this was this entire season. Take a lead into the ninth, man, Luke Smith, what a performance, and super proud of him and all these guys that fought hard. It's not easy to get this far.

There's a lot I want to brag on them in this meeting, so let me wrap up and let you guys ask these student-athletes some questions.

Q. Justin, I'm curious, from your perspective, how much fun is it to play behind a guy like Luke who not only is efficient and effective but wears his heart on his sleeve and goes out and attacks?

JUSTIN LAVEY: Yeah, Luke has done it all year for us. You know he's going to go out and give it his all. His emotion plays on everybody, and it rubs off on you. And he just did his thing tonight, and it was amazing.

Q. Luke, to follow that up, you and Julian Infante kind of had some words back and forth. I know you play with a lot of emotion. Was that something he said or the adrenaline in you?

LUKE SMITH: That was just the adrenaline. Vanderbilt is a great team, and I respect -- I love that part of baseball. When they got their big hit in the ninth, they celebrate; that's how it goes. When I strike somebody out, I celebrate, and that's just the way it is.

Q. Luke, after you come back in the eighth, what kind of discussion did you have about going back there for the ninth? Did you kind of tell them, hey, I want to finish this thing?

LUKE SMITH: I absolutely wanted to -- that's every -- to pitch a complete game in a College World Series is something not very many people can say. I had confidence in myself going back out there, and I'm appreciative of the coaching staff believing in me. I left a ball over the plate, and the guy put it in the right spot.

Q. Justin, you've seen what Luke has been able to do in back-to-back elimination games for you guys. What does that speak to the future of what you guys have? You bring him back, Detmers and Bobby in the starting rotation.

JUSTIN LAVEY: Yeah, it's super exciting. Obviously this one hurts, but looking ahead, it looks bright, and we've got great players coming back, and it should be another great year next year.

Q. Justin, talk about this season. You guys have had the ups and downs, you've fought with your backs against the wall many times. What does this team mean to you guys as a group?

JUSTIN LAVEY: Yeah, this team is just a special group. A lot of love we have for each other, we play for each other every game. In that regional we had our backs against the wall, and we all came together, and that was something special. Not a lot of teams can do that. We had it here, same thing. We came back and won a couple games. Super special group, so it was a great year.

Q. Guys, all season you guys have sought out to be the so-called best team ever for Louisville baseball. Given you were the first Louisville team to win multiple games in the College World Series, do you feel like you've accomplished that goal?

JUSTIN LAVEY: That was actually the first thing Coach Mac said to our team. That's what definitely brought on more waterworks from me, so thank you for that.

But, yeah, I mean, that's something, from day one, that was our goal, to be the best team he's ever coached. To accomplish that is something super special, and it takes a special group.

LUKE SMITH: Yeah, I'd say the same thing. It means the world to do that, and both of us coming back next year, we've got a chance to do that again. That journey, while this one hurts, the new journey starts.

I love all these guys, and it hurts so bad because you grow to love these guys and you spend every -- seems like every hour of every day with them sweating and
just working hard and stuff.

It stings, but Coach Mac is one of the best, and he prepares everybody for -- whether you play pro ball afterwards or whatever you're doing in life. I'm very appreciative of that.

Q. Justin, you mentioned the run you guys have been on from the regional to now. When you guys had your backs against the wall, especially going into that ninth inning, the success you guys have had in those situations, does that make you guys confident you would pull this out?

JUSTIN LAVEY: Yeah, we had all the confidence in our guys. We had a guy on second with one out. We had a chance. We fight. We fight until the last out and leave it all on the field, and that takes a special group. We just couldn't get it done today.

Q. Dan, this group has been on a pretty crazy journey since the tournament started. Can you put into words just what this journey has been like for you to see them grow from where they were in the regional to where they are now?

DAN McDONNELL: You know, I think your hope as a coach is that the kids buy in, and you work so hard the summer and the fall and the winter months, and a lot of things that we do in our program is for the most season. So you might not understand it in February or March, but when the postseason starts, we want to be tournament ready, and all that hard work comes together and guys play well. It's a good feeling.

I know coaches get a lot of credit, but the kids gotta buy in. At the end of the day, talented or not, they have to buy in and they have to be able to execute and go out there and believe, and they did that.

For them, I'm super proud. As they said, I told them in the outfield, it's a goal. It's not easy. You come to the University of Louisville to be the best team ever. But with that being said, they can't be the best team ever if it's not for the '07 team, if it's not for all the players that I've coached, and honestly probably those before them. I get a lot of pride from the alumni, and it's a program.

You can't -- it's hard to accomplish great things like that without being a great program, and that includes a lot of people. Obviously our administration. Our support staff is amazing -- Coach Williams, Coach Snider, Coach Vrable, Coach Mundorf. But it's also the people around our program, Emily and Zach and Pat and Chris Morgan and Doc, and there's so many people that spend so much time and effort to help these kids be the best that they can be.

When you can make a run like this, 50-win season, plus win season, you win the ACC, you're the No. 1 seed in one of the best leagues in the country, it's a great feeling. I'm really proud of this group.

Q. Dan, usually when you guys are talking in the outfield, you usually end it with you haven't finished everything yet. When that yet comes to an end, what's the overall message to the guys when you guys are huddled out there?

DAN McDONNELL: I challenge them to keep their head high. I want to celebrate this group, celebrate it with their teammates, celebrate it with their family, with their friends.

When I say celebrate this group, I told the juniors and seniors, those that are going on to pro ball how ready they are, the academic success they had. We're on eight straight years, 16 straight semesters with a team GPA of a 3.0 or higher. These guys get it done in the classroom. The community, they understand it's much more than just them. They get involved in the community, and they should give back to a great community like Louisville, Kentucky.

So as the saying goes, how do you do anything is how you do everything. You know, I just wanted to celebrate this group out there, and I tell them, just like I said, I guess, yesterday, I don't prepare -- I try to prepare scouting reports and pregame speeches and in the outfield, but I just try to never go to that place when the season ends, what am I going to say.

How Coach Martin did, what Coach Martin did, I guess he had a lot of time to prepare for that. He knew eventually it was going to happen, even if they won the national championship. I was so impressed watching his locker room speech. But as I'm watching it, I'm going: I can't go there. Like I can't prepare something. I can't write something down. I'm just going to have to wing it. It's just going to have to come off the top of my head because as I'm writing notes here, as I'm sitting here, because I just didn't want to prepare for that, just trust God, He'll give me the words, and I'll speak from the heart, and I'll celebrate this group. That's what I told them in the outfield.

Q. You've given Vandy two of its toughest games of the past two months. What makes them such a tough out for this next round?

DAN McDONNELL: You know, they do everything well. I think what's probably most impressive about this team -- nothing against past teams, Tim has had a ton of great teams, but the lineup, it's such a really good lineup. I mean, you have the middle of the lineup beat us there, but they've always got great pitching. They're always good defensively. They always have team speed.
But I think this is one of the better lineups they’ve ever had, and that’s not a knock on their past lineups. I mean, come on, they’re pumping out great players every year, but this to me seems to be one of the most complete lineups, and they jam all those lefties in the lineup, and they can -- they’re pretty good with their splits. It’s not like they’ve got lefties that can’t hit left-handed pitching.

You know, the exciting thing is Tim gets to go against Erik, and that will be something I’ll hope for in the future, that McDonnell can go against Lemonis coming from different brackets.

Q. This is the second time in a row an elimination game Luke has put up a performance like that. One, does that excitement kind of make you -- does that performance make you excited for the future with that program? And did you ever think about pulling him in that ninth before the double?

DAN McDONNELL: Yeah, it’s a great question. We’re definitely excited about the future. We’ve got a lot of talent returning, a lot of talent coming in. But it’s something Coach Williams and I, we always discuss late in the game, and he’s very respectful of my opinion, even though I’m going to -- 99 percent of the time I’m going to go with his thought.

I just felt really good. I just -- I’d probably feel worse now if I took him out, we blow the lead in the ninth, and it’s always hindsight. You don’t know.

But the way he was pitching, how he kept their hitters off balance, and even though it was emotional, that was him. That’s how he pitches. I go back to Josh Rogers. I told Sean Moth on the postgame radio show, we took Josh out, he’s a Big League pitcher now, and he was super emotional, against Cal State Fullerton, like crossing the line, but it’s college baseball, we kind of let that slide a little bit. And he gave us like six or seven innings, and I just remember thinking: He’s just too emotional and let’s take him out and trust our bullpen. And we ended up losing that game in like 11 innings. And I always kind of kick myself.

You know, and that’s the challenge in coaching, is you don’t want to take your pitcher out too early and you don’t want to take him out too late.

But I think I can sleep tonight. I mean, you get the best hitter in the country out to lead off the inning, you close on Bleday. I thought those pitches were close. I’m not saying they were strikes or not, but it wasn’t like he was all over the place. And then your 3-hole hitter hooks one down the corner, and that’s a tandem relay I wrote in my game notes. He’s out at the plate if we make a clean relay. I mean, there’s two outs with a runner on second, and as a coach, man, that always hurts because it’s something we work on every week, tandem relays.

So you write that in your game notes, and it just reminds you next year you’d better work on those tandem relays.

Let me thank Randy and Chad and the NCAA. Let me thank the baseball committee and those ADs. They spend a lot of time, and I’ve gotten a chance to speak to that group, and that’s a big commitment, man. They’re giving up days, weeks of their life, leaving their families to help run such a great event. And I’m biased, but I’d say this has got to be one of the greatest events in the country. I’m so blessed that we were a part of it, and I just want to thank everybody.

Our media, man, they come out. Louisville is a great sports city, and I’m just proud that we give them something to follow, especially this last month. You could follow us a little more in February, but I know basketball is going on, and I understand. But I do really appreciate their support and their attention. And for the fans that came out here, spent a lot of money and dropped their schedule for all those back in Louisville, Kentucky, and following us on TV, I’m real appreciative. We’ve got something special going here, and I don’t ever want to take that for granted.

We’re 13 years into this. Vandy might pass us if they keep winning games, but going into the season we were the winningest program in all of college baseball, 12 years running. So I think we’re going to be up there. I don’t know if we’ll hold on to the No. 1 spot. And so for that, I give God the glory. He’s blessed this program, and as I always end it, we’ll be back.

Thanks, everyone.