

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Auburn Tigers

Butch Thompson

Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi 7, Auburn 4

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Butch Thompson. Coach, before we begin to take questions, if you would please give us your general thoughts on tonight's game.

BUTCH THOMPSON: Just Nkhazy, the starting pitcher for Ole Miss, he's special. We've seen him a bunch, and we prepared hard for him. Our guys hung around. I guess he got six innings there, and we kind of hung in there; then Broadway, the closer, got into the ball game. But I thought we competed well against a special arm.

Then pitching-wise, I thought Carson Skipper gave us a chance after Ole Miss had scored there in the third inning and Joseph Gonzalez got us out of a bases-loaded situation and not make it any worse. Carson really did a nice job for three frames there, really until he got into a pitch count.

So we shoved all our chips on the table with our best reliever here the last three or four weeks and tried to get back in the ball game, made it a one-run game, and of course, the Dunhurst home run was big in the ball game.

I really thought the guy they brought in to pinch hit, went to right field; Rankin Woley had hit a ball there in the eighth inning that he made an unbelievable running catch, kind of in the right field corner. I thought that was another big defensive play that I thought we'd have been right back in business in the 8th inning. All in all, Ryan Bliss is one of the best players in the conference. Started the game off, got a hit early on, another two RBIs for us. Derek Farquhar had two hits.

I told them I appreciate their effort for us, especially the second half of conference play, and gave us an opportunity to be here tonight and what they've done for our university, especially a lot of these guys that will not be returning for



next season.

Q. Butch, I guess, if you would, just talk about Jack. He came back on short rest. What did you see out of him? And I guess his struggles tonight.

BUTCH THOMPSON: Around the first inning, but really the second, I thought he threw some of his best fastballs. He wound up getting some strikeouts, especially looking or chased there. I thought that was huge for him getting out of the first with only one run. I thought the second inning he was going to steady himself and right himself. Like I said, when they flipped over the second time through the lineup, just they were connected, hitting barrel connected to it, and I thought we were hung up at that point.

Like I said, when Bench hit the inside-the-park home run or hit the cap on the back of the fence and it bounced back in play, once Jack got into that third inning and Bench was coming back up, I thought Tim did a good job to have Gonzalez ready, and we were able to get out of the inning.

In one unique way, I thought Jack had a better fastball tonight. Watching a couple pitches because they had replay on the board, a couple of the change-ups, especially versus right-handed hitters, it should be working away from them, cut in. The second baseman was in that regard, and maybe even Bench, but they scored as many runs as anybody in the country. That was going to be a tough offense, just one or two pitches here could have made a difference, but we let a great offense have a couple of big at bats.

Q. I know it's kind of hard to analyze the aftermath, but how challenging was the season the way you guys had to scratch and fight for basically anything the whole way through?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, just tough years in the league before as an assistant coach, as a pitching coach, even as a head coach. I remember my first season here coming in just two or three months to prepare for a season.

This one was different. I thought we had a lot of pieces. I just thought the injuries -- but if you look around the entire



league, so many of our teams -- I don't know if it's because of the shortened year, whatever, we've all had challenges. Now is not the time to talk about all of those. I thought it was one of the best efforts I've seen out of young people. Every time I thought this group of guys may stop or pause or just think it's too much, they kind of woke back up. I kind of feel the same way if we were able to continue to play, but when you got to a part of the season, and we put ourselves in position to where you've got to perform.

Tonight was one of those nights, and so it comes to an end. The resilience kind of kept me going with the ball club. Watching those four infielders want to continue to play at a high level kept me going. Seeing those two young catchers, Dyal and LaRue, get better kept me going. Seeing Fitts last week as the pitcher of the week kind of keeps you going when they could have stopped along the way.

So I'm appreciative. A lot of these guys like a Ryan Bliss and a Woley come to our program and has raised our bar and our expectations. When we have a moment like this and we're sitting 2-13 in the league at the halfway point, for them to have a winning record in the second half and continue to play for us says a lot about what they've done to raise our expectations and says what quality people they are and how they were raised by how they finished.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Thompson, for joining us tonight. We appreciate it.

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