

# Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

## Arkansas Razorbacks

### Lael Lockhart

#### Postgame Press Conference



Arkansas 11, Georgia 2

THE MODERATOR: If you could, just give us a brief statement, recap the game, and we'll have questions for you.

LAEL LOCKHART: It was a fun one. It got wet there at the end. But came in here, got a little rushed on the pregame stuff, and went out there not with my best stuff, it felt like. Just decided to close it off and get after it and let the chips fall where they may, and it ended up being a good day.

**Q. You just said you maybe didn't have your best stuff. Were you not feeling that good in the bullpen, and then once you got out for the game, the stuff got better, obviously? What do you think happened?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I think it was more so going into the pen, and guys kind of joke about your best days or whenever you have your worst bullpen pregame. And I didn't know if that was going to be the case because I think we got here and they went into extras in the game before. And it felt like we were shortened up on -- I don't want to say the regular routine, but definitely had to alter it a little bit.

In the bullpen, I don't think I had two out of my however many pitches, and I went out there and just trusted it and let it rip, and it was good.

**Q. What all was working for you today?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I would have to say the fastball and the curve ball were my go to, it seemed like, all game long. Tried the change-up here or there, wasn't really that great, was leaving them up. Tried a slider. It was kind of getting touched or fouled off when it usually is my go to pitch. Made that adjustment, I think, right around the third or end of the second inning and just rode it out from there.

**Q. You were within one strike of that perfect game -- you know, seven inning game, so dominant, but you came back and regrouped and got the strike out there to end the inning. How disappointing was that to be so close and then kind of how did you regroup there?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I'd be lying to you if it wasn't going through my mind that last inning to go out there. I was pulling for the boys to get the ten runs so it would shorten up and make it a little bit easier. When it came down to the last pitch, I thought we were almost shifted over. We seem to shift me over on a lefty. I believe that's who was batting, and I think it was a right-to. I believe it was Nesbit at short, and I looked through and saw Battles got to the ball. I thought, if anyone's going to make this play, it's going to be Jalen Battles just firing this one over to first. And I was praying he was almost -- whoever the guy hit him was tripped, fell, whatever, and it was just going to be game over.

**Q. You mentioned you kind of knew it in the second inning. Did you realize you had a perfect game? When did you realize you were dealing a perfect game?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I came out after the -- coming out of the fifth. I can't remember which inning it was. I want to say it was the fifth when it was a line drive to Robert Moore. And I was kind of like we got two more innings, guys, put up ten runs, we'll get this rolling. That seventh inning was kind of like, all right, let's get after it and see if we can do something.

**Q. This year, getting through the fourth and the fifth, you'll be good up to that point, and then you struggle to get through those innings. What was the difference tonight? How were you able to kind of get over that hump?**

LAEL LOCKHART: So I think a lot of it was mentality-wise. It wasn't thinking pitch count, trying to stretch the game. It was attack every hitter every out, all the same, starting from the very first pitch, rather than stressing out over trying to extend or whatever the case was. And just, if I go three innings and throw up three zeros, great. If I can go

longer, awesome. But just go as long as I can for the guys and keep throwing up zeros.

**Q. Last thing I got. You have those three straight kind of rough starts, and you actually came out of the bullpen in a midweek game, and it seems like that really got you back on track. Do you think that's what got you on track? How did you get things turned around?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I would say that's absolutely the point where it was don't worry about pitch count, don't worry about anything. You're coming out of the pen. Throw up a few zeros, one zero, whatever the case is, and just get after guys. That was the big mentality shift for me. It wasn't anything mechanical. It was purely mindset in my eyes.

**Q. Do you feel personally like a weekend starter, that this kind of performance puts you in there for the regional?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I mean, for me, it really doesn't matter how it ends up. Just whatever happens coming into this regional, whoever's throwing the ball, I think all guys on our staff are going to look at it the same way, give us the best chance. It doesn't matter if we're piecing a start together or piecing a game together. I think guys on this staff, it doesn't matter who you give the ball to, are going to go out three, throw up zeros, and just fight for guys in the dugout.

**Q. McAllister gave you a really good at bat in the first inning. And then he's the guy who had the hit in the seventh. What were you trying to get him with there?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I think in the seventh was -- that last pitch, I think it was the pitch before, it was a fastball. I think it was maybe a 60-40 ball, if I have that right. I was just praying he was going to give me strike three there. Didn't get it. Next pitch we went fastball away. That was the only pitch on the night where I was like, all right, let's really rare back, try to get after it. Saw it go through the 6 hole. Jalen gets to it. I thought, if he makes the play, he makes the play. I'll treat Jalen to a dinner, whatever the case is. It was fun, that's for sure.

**Q. I know you threw some good games at Houston, and you had some good games here before this. Where does this rank as far as your best game or right up there? What do you think?**

LAEL LOCKHART: I think this is right up there with me, if not the best one, just because of kind of everything that was on the line leading up to it. I don't think I've ever been close to anything like a no-hitter-wise, perfect game-wise,

in my career, going back to high school, travel ball, summer ball, whatever the case is. It was fun. It's up there for me, though.

**Q. We know Peyton's out for the year now. Do you feel like, hey, I can help step up and help fill a void there?**

LAEL LOCKHART: Absolutely. I have the confidence in all my stuff, the mentality. I have confidence in the guys in dugouts putting up runs. As long as I go out there and trust my stuff and fill it up, I think I have a really good chance every time I step out on the mound.

**Q. I have a question maybe for something down the line. This is your first year with them. What's it been like throwing to Casey, and what do you think of him as a catcher, and what he does for you and the other pitchers?**

LAEL LOCKHART: It seems like the zone opens up every time Opitz is behind the plate. He's going to steal you whether it's a ball or two off, up, down, left, right. He just makes it easier on you. You don't have to think about pitches because you know he's already two steps ahead, thinking everything through. You've just got to rare back and let it fly.

**Q. He calls most of the pitches. The coaching staff really trusts his judgment, and pitchers do too. What do you think about the way he handles the pitching staff and calling the game and stuff?**

LAEL LOCKHART: You couldn't ask for anybody better behind the plate. If there's someone I want to pitch to, it's Casey Opitz, 100 percent. He keeps guys in check. No one is going to run on him, whatever the case is. There's no one else I want behind the plate each and every day.

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