

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Thursday, May 27, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Mike Bianco

Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi 4, Georgia 0

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you could open up with a statement, and we'll have questions for you.

MIKE BIANCO: Just proud of the way we showed up today. Tough loss for us last night, obviously, and getting back to the hotel late. But you've got to do it in tournaments. That's kind of the message for the team this morning. We showed up and played really hard.

Of course, the story of the game was Drew McDaniel. Just super dominant, and of course Brandon Johnson after him, and Broadway is just as good as they come at the end of the game.

Some big hits, obviously. Gonzalez had a couple. A couple big hits by Chatagnier, and a big homer by Graham, but not a ton of offensive Georgia can really pitch it. Today we saw their No. 2 and their No. 3, but scored just enough and pitched it really well.

Q. You mentioned Drew, what he did today, but what does it kind of say about him how he did this today and just a few days ago he played the same team and it was almost the opposite result? What does it say about him as a pitcher?

MIKE BIANCO: If you're going to be successful in this game, you've got to be able to handle the adversity. You're exactly right. That's probably the thing that sometimes gets lost in this. Less than a week ago on Saturday, he ran out there in Athens and didn't pitch well. Give them a lot of credit. They had a great offensive day, but I know he was disappointed in his outing.

Today was a different story, and that's why you play the game. I thought it was terrific, a four-pitch mix. Just really filled up the strike zone. They didn't threaten a ton, didn't have a ton of base runners, but the few times that they did,



he did what you have to do to win the game and made some pitches and got off the field.

Really proud of him. It's been tough down the stretch for him. Since we lost Gunnar, we've put a lot on Diamond and McDaniel, and sometimes they've answered, and sometimes it's been tough for them. People forget that they're freshmen. They're COVID freshmen. They were here last year, but they played four weeks of baseball, and so they're still basically first-year guys and have handled a lot of pressure, and Drew was excellent.

Q. A quick follow-up from me. You had the series against Vanderbilt, took 2 of 3. You took 2 of 3 against Georgia. Here you're playing good baseball these last few games. Do you think you guys are picking up steam and starting to get hot at the right time, for lack of a better term?

MIKE BIANCO: I'd like to think so. I think we played really well down the stretch. We had a tough weekend at A&M, but remember two of those were, not walk-off wins, but one was a walk-off win in the bottom of the ninth on Friday night, and we had a lead that we blew with a big grand slam on Game 3. So tough weekend there.

But I think we won 3 out of our last 4 SEC weekends against some really good competition. Obviously, we've played pretty well here. Yeah, I think we're playing really well, and I think that's what you want to do at this time of the year.

Q. I'm curious, Mike. You brought it up that it's been a struggle the last five games for Drew. Any adjustments he's made specifically to justify that delivery a little bit? He used to lean back a little bit. Has he made any adjustments like that that allowed him to open up that command a little bit more?

MIKE BIANCO: Well, a couple of things. Physically, today we went with both the slider and the curve ball, and I thought that helped him. As you know, he was a four-pitch guy, and then we kind of bagged the curve ball at the beginning of the season and just went with sliders. Then he kind of got stale with that. He kind of lost the feel of the

slider. Then we went with the curve ball, and that worked for a week or two.

Today we went with all four pitches, and excellent command with all four. Mostly sliders to the right-handers and curves to the left-handers, but some good change-ups, some good fastballs on both sides of the plate. He was able to utilize the fastball in today, which I think allowed him to keep some guys off balance.

I think just more from a mental standpoint, try to get him more in attack mode. That's kind of been the message to him and Derek. Quit feeling for it out there. Compete harder and compete harder for each pitch. Today you could see it. He was really locked in and, again, proud of him.

Q. The encouraging sign of Derek's performance backed up by this, considering regional play coming up and how important they are, just how big of a lift have they been and could they be moving forward?

MIKE BIANCO: It's big. It takes three wins to get through the regional. So you got to win three games. Obviously, Doug's been our ace for quite some time. Not just this year, but for the last three years. But when you lose somebody like Gunnar, you realize that some guys are going to have to pick up the slack.

Those two are very capable, as you've said. Down the stretch it's been a little up and down for them, but they've had great moments here. It's just been a little inconsistent. We're going to need performances like last night and like Drew did today to get through a regional. So that was nice to see this week going into a regional.

Q. What was the moment in the game where you knew Drew really had it and you knew it was a special baseball game than earlier in the season, where he was even better?

MIKE BIANCO: I don't know if there was a moment. I just think early on just watching him command all four pitches, watching him locate his fastball on both sides of the plate to be in really good counts. I don't know if there was a specific moment, but probably early on, maybe the second inning, you go, wow, he looks really good today.

Q. Chatagnier has kind of put it together late in the season. Has there been an adjustment for him or is he finally seeing the ball drop? He said he was hitting it hard when he was going through the slump.

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, obviously, when you start to get some hits, you feel good about yourself. You talk about

hitters, sometimes when you struggle, the good ones sometimes don't believe that they're struggling, right? They're a hit away from getting on a streak. And that may have been a little bit of the hitting it right at them type of deal.

But I will say hand it to him, he's a terrific offensive player. I think one of the adjustments was just being a tick behind the fastball. He's as good of a fastball hitter as we have in the program, and I think he got caught, which a lot of good hitters do, where he just kind of got caught in between. He was a little bit behind the fastball, a little bit out in front of the breaking ball, and just some at bats got away from him.

Even today, the two base hits weren't super barreled up, but they were big base hits. He was on the ball long enough to be able to hit a line drive into the outfield where the last few weeks he's kind of struggled with that.

But somewhere maybe in Georgia sometime, you could see the swings and being on time for the fastball, and the swings were getting better.

Q. There were two plays in the game that didn't result in the run and won't look significant in the score book, but could you talk about Justin Bench's slide in the third inning at third base. Is that something that's taught or is it an instinct thing by Justin? And, second, what's the impact on Tim being able to go first to third in the fifth inning on the hit by Peyton?

MIKE BIANCO: The first question, the slide, it's totally coaching. No, I'm teasing. Those are instinctive plays. Justin is a tremendous athlete. I thought it was a great throw by the right fielder, and Justin made one of those how-to-win awareness plays, diving into the base, and showing them the left hand and pulling it back and getting the right hand in there.

As far as Elko going first to third, there's probably an asterisk because it was a 3-2 count with two outs, and I think he was running on the pitch, if I'm not mistaken. But to get him to go 180 feet, not just 90 feet, was a big deal for us. I say that tongue in cheek, but it's really the truth. Right now our worry about Tim is just getting from base to base -- not health-wise, it's just how much he's going to bog down the offense.

Obviously, hitting homers helps and getting extra base hits, but that's one of the things, as the game progresses, is when do we pull him out and run for him? The more that he can do that, obviously the better we are because, when he's in the lineup, we're a better team.

Q. Your team has proven itself to be a very resilient

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bunch, whether it's battling through injuries or coming off tough losses like yesterday and winning the game. What do you think has made them to be as resilient as they are?

MIKE BIANCO: We've done that all year long. It's been an amazing thing. In the fall, all the beat writers -- it's a great question, but it's a question you can't answer in the fall or early in the year about team chemistry and leadership and those types of things. Those are things that you have to wait until you get through the spring. They're better answered at the end of the season rather than prior to the season.

To your question, you don't know how you're going to handle that adversity. This team's been kicked in the gut more than any team I've ever coached in 21 years here at Ole Miss and probably the 30 years that I've been coaching. I can't remember a time where -- it's not just Elko, it's Hogle, and it's Cioffi. It's losing your two first basemen in the first week for about three or four weeks. The entire season -- losing Chatagnier at the beginning of the season for a month with a pulled hamstring. It just seemed like the entire season, once we started to get going, we'd get bad news. This team has just handled it.

If we had a bad weekend -- we had several weekends where we didn't win an SEC weekend. We were close. We didn't get swept. We'd always win a game, at least close or one of the others where it didn't go our way, but these guys are resilient. They're relentless, and they just continue to show up.

That's one of the things we preach. This team just plays. When they put the uniform on and get in the bus and come over to the field, they just play. It's a great group to be around.

Q. How can you guys build from this and continue to succeed in this tournament?

MIKE BIANCO: Well, we'll get a little rest tonight. That's probably the best thing for them. I don't know how much rest the coaches will get, but for the guys, they'll be able to get a little normal dinner, a dinner before midnight tonight, and be able to get into their beds and get their legs back underneath them.

Now, when you get this deep into the tournament, especially if you played on Tuesday, it's just being able to piece it together, be able to throw enough strikes and be in some good counts here and be able to put some innings together so you can make it a little easier on the pitching staff. Once you get through three games, it starts to become a grind here.

You can do it. We've played on the final day coming through on a Tuesday, but you just -- it's about playing well.

Q. Do you know who you'll pitch tomorrow?

MIKE BIANCO: Yes, Tyler Myers.

Q. I know this is part of the game, but is there nervousness from you a little bit when Tim gets intentionally walked right now and starts that journey around the bases?

MIKE BIANCO: I don't think they're intentionally walking him because he doesn't run real fast. I think they're intentionally walking because he's like the natural up there, so it's part of it. You'll take the free base, especially if Chatagnier and Dunhurst and those guys behind him swing it well, that's okay.

So, no, I don't get nervous. It's just part of the deal.

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