

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Thursday, May 27, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Florida Gators

Kevin O'Sullivan

Postgame Press Conference



Florida 7, Alabama 2

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I thought it was a really well-pitched game on both sides. Their starter was really, really good. I think it was a scoreless game through five. Nathan came up with a big home run, but I think the story for us today was Franco Aleman and the start that he gave us. I felt like he pitched really good last weekend at Arkansas, and he certainly built off that today.

Q. Sully, just looking at the last couple of starts for Franco, what are you kind of noticing was a little different from him just from an approach? What are you seeing differently than you saw in previous starts?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I think sometimes he has a tendency to maybe overthink certain pitches or certain situations at times. It's been really -- it's been one inning in the outings when he hasn't been successful. It's always been like one inning where it kind of got away from him. But I think he's learning to manage innings better. He's making the most of the four pitches of the ball game. He's figuring that out.

There's a reason we kept him in the rotation as long as we did because we figured if we had a chance to do what this team ultimately wants to do, he was going to have to be one of our three starters.

Q. Just a follow-through, when you looked at Dylan Smith for Alabama -- obviously, you guys got to him eventually -- but what were you kind of seeing from him early on? It seemed like he had a really good feel for the slider and the fastball.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: He did. We were going to try to take away his fastball, but the fastball was really good to both sides of the plate. He pitched ahead. He was 92, 96, at least by the board. He was landing his breaking ball, he threw a couple change-ups to our left-handed hitters. He was good. He was really good. That's probably the best

he's thrown in quite some time.

But like I said, I think we've been seeing the ball well. We're swinging the bats as good as we have all year long, and he kept us right in check for certainly the first five, six innings.

Q. You mentioned, I think it was before the Arkansas series, you guys needed to tinker with the way Franco warmed up just to get him ready earlier. And then I noticed today later in his outing, he ditched the windup and was going from the stretch. What kind of adjustments have you guys made with him?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: No, it's more of -- just more mental adjustments more than any physical, and he's still really young, and he's still growing into his body. There are times throughout a game where he just feels more comfortable sometimes out of the stretch because there's a lot of moving parts, and we don't really say anything to him. If he feels more comfortable getting out of the stretch and he gets to the point in the game and it helps him get another three, six outs or so towards the latter part of his outing, we just kind of let him go.

Q. All year, I think, we talked about Nathan Hickey and Jud Fabian, but it seems like Jacob Young has been the spark plug at the top of the order for you guys this week.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I was saying it on the radio with Jeff. He's everything you want in a player that you're coaching. He's a great student, and he makes all the right decisions off the field. But as far as a baseball player, he really sets a good example for the younger players. He's a team player, number one, and he always gives good efforts on the field. He only knows one gear, and like I said, he's the epitome of what you want in a player in a program like ours, and he certainly sets the example that way.

Q. So I noticed that you did walk out to the mound during Jack Leftwich's stance on the mound. I was wondering what the message that was relayed after that walk and hit?

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KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I mean, just a normal visit. Asked if he was all right, and he said yeah. That was it.

Q. One more question. Tomorrow the team gets a day off. How important is that to the team?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: You would have to ask them. We'll probably have some optional hitting. We've been on the road for quite some time. We're going to give the guys the opportunity to, if they want to, just get away from the game for a day. That's perfectly fine. There might be some guys that are going really good right now and don't want to take a day off and go hit in the cages. We'll address that with the team, but they certainly have earned a day off tomorrow.

Q. Two days in a row, your catchers made a big defensive play. Tonight caught stealing at third base. Can you just talk about what Mac brings to the game defensively.

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: He's really good defensively. He's starting to put together some more competitive at bats too. You have to keep in mind he hasn't had a lot of at bats in a while. With him being able to come back and him being able to catch, it gave us certainly the flexibility to potentially put Nathan at third and keep Chris's bat in the lineup, so there's a lot of small moving parts. But getting him back and having the ability to catch has certainly helped our lineup for sure.

Q. And what do you think of what you've seen from Nathan at third base?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I mean, fine. He played infield in high school and travel ball, stuff like that. We trust him at first, and it was a decision that was brought to me on -- I guess -- what's today, Thursday? It was yesterday morning. I was talking with Chuck and the other coaches, and I mentioned, what do you think about playing Nathan at third? And I immediately thought it's a really, really good move.

Not having Chris Armstrong's bat in the lineup on Tuesday, it just felt like there was a huge gap right there in the middle. And having his presence back in the lineup the last couple days, it certainly made our lineup a little bit different.

Q. This is probably your best -- I don't know about three games in a row from the pitching staff, but if you want to call it a three-game series -- I think probably the best all year, would you agree with that?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I would. I think we only gave up one

run against Kentucky, one run against a really good Mississippi State team, and obviously today we only gave up two. I think the scores are probably very -- you know, indicate how well we've been throwing. We've gotten three really quality starts. That's probably one of the reasons why we're in the position we are.

Q. Then you had Mac's pick off at third, but you also had Aleman pick one off at first. I think that was the first time all year. Is he your best guy at doing that this year?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I mean, they all should be pretty good at it. We only have one pick on the year, so I don't know if anybody is that good at it, but certainly that was a big moment in the game.

Q. Have you put any thought into who will go Saturday, and does your -- you probably come into the tournament really wanting to win that first game to make it into double elimination. Now that you're into the semifinal, does it change your approach to the tournament at all with regionals coming up next week?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: No. The three starters have certainly got their work in. We would not use any of those starters again in this tournament and give them a breather and let them get ready for the regionals. We haven't really decided who we're going to start yet on Saturday, but we've got some other guys that need to pitch, and some guys that haven't been on the mound in quite some time.

We're going to use -- it's probably -- I would imagine it would probably either be Brandon Sproat or Christian Scott starting on Saturday.

Q. For the younger guys that haven't experienced postseason baseball, how important is it to make a little bit of a run here heading into regionals?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I think it's about momentum. I think it was important for us to play well this week, and we have after the weekend we had at Arkansas. I get asked that question a lot about how you want to approach this tournament, and the bottom line is you want to win every game you play. You want to get out of this thing healthy and injury-free, knock on wood, but you certainly don't want to come here and not play well and have to sit on it for seven, eight, nine days before you play again in a regional.

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