

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 28, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Tennessee Volunteers

Evan Russell

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee - 11, Alabama - 0

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Evan Russell.

Q. What were you all seeing at the plate today that led to an offensive outburst, and just how much extra motivation was there for you today given how Wednesday went?

EVAN RUSSELL: You had a team that wasn't ready to go home. You had a lineup that was ready to get back out there and play a good Alabama team. I think it showed with the swings we took. I think it showed with the at bats we took. Everyone was kind of locked in, and we were on the attack mode. I think that's what was the difference this game.

Q. I'm guessing after the past couple days, are you going to try to get all games to be played before noon? It seems like you all bring the bats to play in these games.

EVAN RUSSELL: I didn't know we had a lot of morning people on our team, but it seems like it's been working out for us. I think it goes to show that we've got a lot of disciplined guys when it comes to nutrition and their sleep schedule. It shows that a lot of people on this team are not happy just to be here. We want to win games, and we want to compete, and we want to give ourselves the best chance possible to play in a game tomorrow that we've set ourself up for.

Q. What about going into the weekend kind of without some of the regular weekend starting pitchers? I know you all used those people the past three days. Are you kind of excited to see what some other guys can do in a big spot like that?

EVAN RUSSELL: Absolutely. It was good to see our three starters come out and throw the way they did. Starting with



Heflin, he threw a heck of a game. Chad Dallas was being himself. And Blade Tidwell is unbelievable. He's growing every outing. He's going to pitch for a long time. It's exciting to see who we're going to have show up in big moments because it's becoming a point in the season where we're going to have to have guys step up and be able to throw the rock for us.

It's an exciting moment, and it's going to be fun to watch people grow.

Q. You and Drew have kind of been on a roll setting into yesterday. I wonder how much confidence the rest of the team gets when you two are hitting the way you have the past two days?

EVAN RUSSELL: This game is so confidence based. You've seen earlier in the season when Drew Gilbert is firing on all cylinders, it's a dangerous hitter. The hits and homers come in bunches, so once us two, we start get going, the confidence is there in both of us, we ride the momentum very well. Having us at 4 and 5 starting the game off, having good ABs and good swings, it's a really good spot for our lineup.

Q. You just said a minute ago Blade's been on a pretty unreal tear the last five starts or so. From the beginning of the season till now, where have you seen him kind of improve the most?

EVAN RUSSELL: He's still throwing 98 miles an hour. At the beginning of the season, he was throwing 98 miles an hour. His stuff hasn't improved, hasn't gotten worse. He's still throwing the same talent-wise, but that dude has grown mentally and with a confidence that you can't fake, especially in this game. You can't just wake up out of bed and tell yourself, I'm going to have a great day. Confidence is gained over time. It's gained throughout the season.

Watching this dude turn into a completely different pitcher, you know it's special. The best is yet to come for that kid.

Q. Blade's been able to continue throwing 98, 97 into the fifth and sixth inning in these outings. How



impressive is that for someone of his age?

EVAN RUSSELL: The dude is a phenomenal athlete. You watch him on the basketball court or even in the weight room, the dude can do things that I can't, a lot of people in our lineup cannot do, a lot of people on our staff cannot do. He's just a special gift, and he's got the athleticism to really hold his velo throughout the game. The more he grows and the older he gets, it's only going to get better.

Q. I guess there's a lot of people who say this tournament, if you all have a seed like -- you are going to be a top 8 seed no matter what -- that this is a fun tournament, but it doesn't mean a lot. You all said a few times that you just don't want to go home. Was the mindset coming into this tournament to win the thing from the beginning?

EVAN RUSSELL: Yeah, we've got a lot of guys in there, they want to establish a name for themselves. We're trying to build a program here that is very respectable, and we got a head coach that wants to compete with anybody in the entire country. There's not going to be a single game we go in here and not expect to win and not try to win.

It's exciting to see a bunch of guys come into the park and have one goal in mind, and that's to win this whole thing. Even after the first game we played this week, I think we've set ourself up nicely. I'm excited to see how tomorrow goes.

Q. What do you remember about Florida? I guess I know that was the preseason No. 1 team coming into the country, lots of talent. You all had a chance to sweep but kind of let that one get away on Sunday. What do you remember about that team?

EVAN RUSSELL: That's a solid team. They have a dangerous lineup. It's kind of around ours, once they get going, it's hard to stop. I was telling somebody it's a good thing they didn't get the bye because they have a lot of arms, they have a pretty well rounded staff on that team.

Coach O'Sullivan, he's a very well-known coach. He brings a lot of fire. It's going to be a good matchup, and I'm excited. There's going to be a lot of people watching, and they should. I think it's going to be one of the best games the entire year.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports