

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 28, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Mike Bianco

Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi - 4, Vanderbilt - 1

THE MODERATOR: Coach, before we take questions, if you will please give us your general thoughts on the game.

MIKE BIANCO: Just very proud of the guys, especially Tyler. I know our beat writers know the story, and it's probably already been asked to him, but for a guy that had Tommy John surgery a little over a year ago, right before last year's season, and battled back from that. He's been an important part, an important piece of our bullpen, but his year, like a lot of guys from surgery, has been up and down. He's had some really good outings and some outings where he struggled a little bit.

But he was outstanding today against one of the best offenses in our league, and of course I thought offensively it's tough to muster much against Leiter. He's just so, so good, one of the best I've ever seen in our league. But I thought our guys really worked to grind out some ABs and made it hard on them, especially in the early innings. Not just the inning that we scored the couple runs, but through maybe the first four or five.

Unfortunately, he got pretty efficient there at the end and was able to stay in the game maybe longer than we thought he would be, but, again, just really proud of our guys.

Q. Mike, you touched on it, but Tyler's story, that's three starts in three years. He had Tommy John. He's been through a lot. You've been with him through the whole process and seen what he's gone through. For you, to see him have that moment, how cool was it for you as a coach?

MIKE BIANCO: In our profession, that's the coolest, right? Winning trophies and games are awesome, but what keeps you young, what makes you want to do this in the good days and bad days are guys like Tyler, right? The guys



that you watch them go through so much adversity and handle it. He's handled it so, so well -- through the rehab, COVID, all the other things, and a guy that's got a giant smile. You know, Ben. You've seen him for a few years now, just a giant smile, a guy that brings positive energy every single day that he shows up.

You had no doubt, when he got injured, he'd be back, but you just don't know what. And in tournament time, you need guys like this. They call it the step up, but guys that maybe weren't thought to be the star or guys that you thought that you would lean on in a tournament, and then when you look up, heck, you get seven-plus innings from a guy that's been a reliever basically the whole year.

Q. And you knew you were going to get to this point at some point if you made a run in the tournament. You'd have to pick a fourth starter. For him, what made him the right call for you, and what was the plan to attack Vandy?

MIKE BIANCO: I think a couple things. One, he's the guy that's done it before, even though he's mainly a reliever and he's been mainly a reliever in his career. But he's an older veteran guy. You knew he'd compete against a really good club in Vandy, that he would attack them.

The plan was just to -- like you've heard the proverbial keep them off balance, try to throw fastballs in, fastballs away, mix in his breaking ball and change-up. He was as sharp as I'd seen him probably in his career today and just made them really uncomfortable, I think, offensively.

Q. I asked Kevin about this, but six or seven elimination game wins in Hoover the last two trips. What's the message for guys for a game like this? Obviously, there's not true elimination. There's a postseason afterwards, but you're still trying to win the tournament.

MIKE BIANCO: No doubt. It's one of those things that's kind of that dry run before you start the NCAA Tournament. We talked about it going into this week where it's the first time -- the season's really broken up into three segments, three different seasons. You have the first season, which



is that nonconference four weeks, and then you start conference play, and that's like the second season. Then the third season, obviously, is the most important, postseason.

The neat thing about postseason and the difference, as you mentioned, is, one, the elimination, where there's going to be games where, if you lose, you're done. The other thing is that you play games you don't know after the game, you don't know what time you're going to play the next day or who you're going to play, like yesterday.

So even though we thought we knew what time we were going to play, we get a call from the SEC, and they said weather, and now you're going to bump it up. Of course, you find out late you're going to play a really good team in Vanderbilt. These types of environments, I think, really prepare you for postseason. I think that's why so many teams in the Southeastern Conference do so well. I'm proud of our guys, especially for the last few years, we've played well here.

Q. I know this is committee question, not Mike Bianco question. How much of the emphasis this week was improving the resume trying to get into the top eight? Have you talked about that at all with your team?

MIKE BIANCO: Not at all. I don't mean that as coach's speak. You know it's not worth the energy. It's not worth the distraction. We realize that that's part of it. I think, especially as coaches, you realize the better that you play here, the longer that you stay here. Obviously, your RPI goes up because you're playing great teams with great records with great RPIs, but you're -- it is your resume. The committee gets to watch you play against the best teams in the country.

But, no, I think it's just wasted energy to focus anything on that. That's up to ten members in Indianapolis.

Q. I just wanted to know if there was an update on Tim Elko. He left the game after getting hit by that pitch. You might not have an update, but how is he doing after that?

MIKE BIANCO: It wasn't being hit by the pitch. What happens to Tim with the ACL is, when he has to hop when he's not prepared to hop, when he's got to move in a direction where he's not really prepared to do that, it kind of moves a little bit on him and bothers him for about ten minutes or so. That's happened a couple times. That's trying to avoid the pitch and kind of shuffling backwards or hopping backwards. So it was really the knee more than it was the pitch.

And he's okay. Sorry. I talked to him after the game.

Q. I don't know if you said it yet, but you may have, your pitching plans for tomorrow?

MIKE BIANCO: No, I have not. We haven't announced that. Wait until we get back to the hotel and meet with the coaches and make a decision at that point.

Q. With Paul Mainieri retiring today, you've played against him for a long time, you've got a son on his team, thoughts on Paul? You've known him forever, just wishing him into retirement.

MIKE BIANCO: I heard about it just a little bit ago. It was a shocker for me and I'm sure a shocker for people in college baseball. Paul is a great coach and had a great career. 1,500 wins, just think about that for a second. 1,500 wins. I know all of us in the Southeastern Conference, the 13 other coaches wish him the best, and the way he's represented, not just LSU, but the Southeastern Conference, just a tremendous career.

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