

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Saturday, May 29, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Tennessee Volunteers

Tony Vitello

Postgame Press Conference

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Tony Vitello. Before we take questions, Coach, if you could please give us your general thoughts on the game.

TONY VITELLO: I don't have anything fancy to say. I don't have as good an accent as Liam either. He's a special kid. He's our leadoff guy and does a great job of leading the team, but obviously, Camden Sewell was the ultimate leader today.

Took the ball. It was kind of our plan all along, when the postseason would roll around, to use him as a starter. He's kind of been a swing man for us. He started in the regional as a freshman. He's fully capable, as you saw today. I think Camden Sewell can win this game today, but Camden Sewell in the zone showed up, or whatever you want to call it. He was in a flow there, and it's pretty special to watch. We certainly owe him a big, big thanks.

Overall, the team showed up with good energy today and played well. It's an important time of year to have some consistency to you because the surroundings, they're loud, the lights are bright, and they're ever changing too with what's going on. You're best off just kind of relying on your training, which is the great conference of the SEC, and just play ball. Ready for whatever you got.

Q. Tony, I know that going through the year, you all have been fortunate to have those same three weekend guys all year long. As a coach -- and I know Sewell's got some experience, but is there part of you that has some anxiety thinking about, okay, this is big time in the postseason and going to give the ball to a guy who hadn't started, I guess, all year, maybe a couple times. Is there some anxiety that comes as a coach when you have to think about things like that?

TONY VITELLO: Not with him, to be honest with you. We



kind of had it sorted out, it was down to a few guys what we were going to do. I can tell you overall that was not the pitching plan. It wasn't even close, but he smashed that into pieces with the way he was throwing the ball.

Again, he's had a great career since he's been here. He's been in every spot you can imagine, whether it's closing a game in the SEC, starting a regional, pitching the middle of a game, just facing one hitter to come in and do his thing.

There's a couple other guys too. I'm not speaking out of hand for other coaches too. We've got some guys that are draft picks, some guys that may make it to the Big Leagues that we haven't used yet. I'm not telling you we have a huge Arsenal of guys. Frank does a good job training these guys, and we've used them in a bunch of different situations. There's guys with quality numbers that have been in big situations before, so it kind of helps alleviate any anxiety.

You just hope they go out there and throw the ball like they're capable of because you can kind of read it. It can be a scrimmage. It doesn't have to be a big thing. You can kind of read it when the ball is coming out the way it should out of a guy's hand and when it's not. When those guys do that, it's not a seven or eight-man staff that Coach Anderson can brag about, it's a bigger quantity of guys there.

Q. With Sean Hunley, have you ever seen the guy get flustered, whether he's on the field, off the field? It just seems like he's on level as much as anyone you'll see?

TONY VITELLO: No. Jalen Beeks is the only guy that I can think of was the same. He was at Arkansas. He's in the Big Leagues now. Maybe that composure can bring Sean to the Big Leagues. There's only a couple guys that I've been around. Everyone knows Max, he's a psycho. It's okay to show emotions in some of those situations, but the world could be coming to an end, and he just kind of maintains what his personality is and keeps plugging away.

It's a great example -- kind of talked about Liam's leadership and Sewell's. At the end of the game there, it's a great lesson for our guys that there isn't anything that's

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going to pop up in a baseball game that should be a surprise. Every time you come to the park, you see something new, and when it happens, rather than going ballistic or completely overreacting, I guess do what Sean Hunley would do.

Q. Just from an Xs and Os standpoint, a baseball nerd standpoint, what was Camden doing so well to be efficient today?

TONY VITELLO: His tempo was awesome. Sometimes he gets a little hyped up. He has an up tempo delivery, and he likes to work quick. Both starters were the same in that fashion. But sometimes he'll take that to an extreme and let his emotions get the best of him and get going fast.

The other thing too, sometimes a guy gets on base here or there, a tendency for him or any pitcher is to start to stress the situation. No pitcher wants runs to score, but the best way to not let runs score is to be who you are and again maintain that composure we talked about prior to this and just throw the ball the way you're supposed to.

Again, I feel like -- and no disrespect, obviously, to Florida. They could beat anybody in the country, but if he just throws the ball the way he's capable of, he could beat those guys today or at least give us a chance to win. But, again, I think he was excited about the opportunity we gave him and then also kind of got in a little bit of a flow there.

Really, again, that could just be who he is. Sometimes he'll disrupt that flow from getting too excited or getting too emotional on the mound. So a great personal lesson for him to carry into his next effort.

Q. And then wanted to ask you about Frank Anderson's mound visit. I swear every time he goes out there, you all get out of whatever jam you're in. I would love to see the stat on that. From your perspective, how do you think you all have such success after Frank goes out there?

TONY VITELLO: Dude, are you the guy that's in the dugout saying, hey, it's the seventh inning. We've got a no-hitter going. You're trying to jinx us, which I joke about. Kind of tough to hear any courtesy laughs on Zoom.

No, Frank has been around as long as anybody, and all the umpires in the league, all you've got to do is ask them how competitive he is. It's to a fault, but also he's incredibly intelligent, and he uses that competitiveness in combination with his thoughts, and that's how he gets guys like Garrett Crochet from point A to a point B that's almost on another level or really is.

There's no magic in any pregame speech we have or coaching advice or anything like that, but I think our guys are able to calm themselves and play catch whether it be the defense or the guys on the mound when he goes out there and kind of handles the situation.

It makes it easy on me. My only time out there is just going to be to switch up who we're going to use.

Q. I assume what happened with you a couple weeks ago with you and Dave got blown out of proportion. I saw you and Matt Hobbs talking between games. What was that conversation like? How good was it to see him in person and talk?

TONY VITELLO: We've shared texts and things like that. Matt Hobbs is like a brother. I would hope he would say the same thing. We were teammates and same graduating class. Our kids are finding it out in Mississippi and Arkansas who are about to play. Those friends they have in college baseball, it tops high school, and they'll never get it in pro ball, and that's no disrespect to Major League Baseball, but they're just not going to match that.

That's where my relationship stems from with Matt, and it's gone on. Yeah, it maybe would add more controversy online or for fans or whatever, but the bottom line is I had my mask up because we got our beats up and I didn't want to talk. Coach Van Horn is a mentor for me, and he's also a gracious winner, and he just wanted to say good job, and I didn't want to chat. He was frustrated I didn't, so he made a point to say it. That's when I said something that really should be handled away from the field. So his reaction, I don't think, was out of line, and that's what kind of stirred the attention.

Then said the hell with it, might as well try and sort it out here while the emotions are going, but that's not a good idea because, again, there's emotions going. It doesn't take a genius to figure out we lost that game because they beat us. I worked under him and have learned a lot, and it's not good to be an easy loser, and he's not and I'm not, and that's the end of it.

He's a guy, like I said, that has sent me information and congratulations and things like that. So same thing with Sully. We talked last night on the phone. We're going to compete like crazy against each other and, quote, unquote, hate each other or whatever you want to call it for three hours, and then afterwards, I think everybody that's in this league respects what everybody's doing because it is an absolute grind.

Then from my personal standpoint, I'm not trying to kiss anybody's butt or anything like that, but I'm single. I don't

know how guys do this with families and kids and juggle everything that's going on because it's a time consuming deal, and we're all very passionate about it.

Q. You're at the end of a long week. How do you approach pitching tomorrow? First from a starting standpoint, but then just trying to keep your pitchers fresh with regionals on the horizon.

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, you know as well as anyone -- I just talked with a representative from you guys -- that 2017 thing was -- my heart was cut in half, and I think the way that SEC Championship went and the travel afterwards, I think there was a bit of a carry-over effect there. You've got to manage your calories and your travel right. Fortunately, we're close to Birmingham, so I think that helps our guys a little bit.

Everyone wants to win this thing. It's a pretty cool deal. But you also want to be prepared to go into next weekend. It's a juggling act. The case of you asking a question about the pitching is let's look at what the guys have done the last two weeks workload and then maybe even have some conversations with guys too. Then too, probably what comes down to what all of us have to do is don't even give some of these guys the option.

A guy like Blade Tidwell, I said, can you get an out tomorrow, there's zero question he's going to do that, but that would be foolish. So you don't even write his name on the list. You don't give him that option. Those are some of the components that will go into it, but I think whoever plays tomorrow, including our guys, are going to get a phenomenal repetition. And I keep saying it over and over, this league will prepare you for success in the postseason, and it's one of the reasons the numbers are the way they are in past years.

Q. Tony, what's it say for your team that you guys can come out and dominate other opponents by run ruling them and then coming out today and having a guy like Camden pitch six innings, you guys only score four runs, and being able to hold on to that. So many different ways you guys win ball games this year, and it's showing in Hoover. What does it say for your team?

TONY VITELLO: They've got a unique little deal where we don't have to do much with them this year. They know how to kind of ebb and flow with what's going on. I don't know if that's the most intelligent way to say it, but for instance, Game 1 didn't go too good for us or any fans. How are you going to handle that? They seem to kind of use it as determination for the next day.

Then I think you're asking more specifically about today. I think what they did the last couple days kind of built up some steam or really created some confidence. Again, you start to get comfortable in your surroundings because this is a grand stage, and then you just start playing baseball.

But like I said, they're playing ball with a deal where you can say as a Coach all you want, yesterday's yesterday or you can't change the past and things like that. But with our game, unlike football, you have to expect all the days and the repetitions because they're so close to one another, to add up. They will have some sort of impact on the day that's your choice as a player. How do you want it to impact? Do you want it to be in a positive way or negative way?

Like I said, they've got some kind of unique deal going on as a group where they find a way to churn out positives out of whatever's gone on previously.

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