

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Sunday, May 30, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Arkansas Razorbacks

Cullen Smith

Postgame Press Conference



Arkansas - 7, Tennessee - 2

Q. Cullen, just as far as just winning this whole tournament, what does it mean? It seems like they always start off, I think, and you just want to play a few games and get ready for the regionals. The more you play it, the more you want to win, it seems like.

CULLEN SMITH: It's something that we've never done here at Arkansas. The team kind of bonded together and said we want to do this for DVH, man. We want to get this thing done for him. He may not say it, but he secretly wants to win this thing every single year he's here, and we want to do that for him. It's hard to explain, but I'm just glad we won it, dude.

Q. Cullen, could you walk us through that at-bat with your home run there in I guess it was the eighth inning or whenever it was.

CULLEN SMITH: I believe he picked off four or five times maybe, and Bobby was giving him fits over there. I was sitting on the first pitch. There was two outs. I knew the odds of us stringing four or five hits together to score three runs was hard. I was just sitting on a middle-middle heater, and I got one, put a good swing on it. I honestly didn't think it was going to go out. I was just hoping it got over his head, to be honest with you, and I got a double out of it. I'm sure I got it out.

Q. Three home runs for you in this tournament. What kind of groove do you feel like you're in with the postseason under way?

CULLEN SMITH: I feel incredible. I finally feel like I'm swinging the bat how I need to swing the bat my whole entire career. Not to say I thought I was swinging it bad, but I feel like I'm finally breaking out of that shell.

Q. Can you give us an idea of the pitching you saw

between Wiggins, and you all brought Lockhart in, who had started in the tournament, and then Kopps.

CULLEN SMITH: I thought Wiggins did a phenomenal job. I thought their hitters did a phenomenal job. I thought them stringing together a run right there with two outs was fantastic baseball. Wiggins throws 98, and even when you know it's coming, it's still hard to hit. It might not look that way, but it is.

I believe -- who came out after him? Lockhart or -- I'm sorry. Costeiu came in and did a fantastic job. Lockhart came in and did what he did the first day through, shoved the ball. And Kevin Kopps is Kevin Kopps, man. He gave up a home run right there, and did what he does, didn't faze him whatsoever. I think this guy should win the Golden Spikes. I've never seen anything like this. In my five years in college baseball, I've never seen a pitcher so dominant in my whole entire life, and he's an even better guy. He absolutely deserves it.

Q. A lot of times, if somebody is asked to switch a position, maybe affects their offense or concentration or some confidence, whatever. But you moved up across the diamond, and obviously it didn't affect your hitting at all. I thought you played pretty good at first base. Kind of how did that work for you this week moving from third to first and then hitting as well as you did?

CULLEN SMITH: I think, regardless of the position, I think the bat was going to be there this weekend. I started really showing it against Tennessee at their place, and I knew I was about to get it going. Defensively, I mean, I practiced there the whole entire fall. I thought that was the best shot I had to get on the diamond. That's what I did. I asked Coach, and he said get a little reps at third, second, first. I feel fantastic over there.

I have some trouble going after balls to my right because at third base, I go and try to get everything to my left. Other than that, I feel great. I feel great picking the ball. I feel great stretching. Yeah, it's definitely a heck of a lot easier than third base, in my opinion. It doesn't bother me.

Q. Jalen is the MVP. What do you think of his play this week and maybe what he's done all season for you guys?

CULLEN SMITH: The dude is an absolute stud. The whole team is filled with absolute studs, but that guy is a big leaguer at shortstop right now, there's no doubt about it, and Bobby is a big leaguer at third base. You've got that double play combo bow. That's what's going to happen. The dude is an absolute beast. He started to swing it well this weekend, barreling balls, and hitting absolute lasers. I knew in his BP and prep work, he was going to go off for us, and we sure needed it, man.

Q. It felt like the game turned on Jalen's defensive play to end the fourth inning. How did it feel on the field and in the dugout after that play? How much of a momentum change did you feel like it was?

CULLEN SMITH: It changed the whole entire game, no doubt about that. I thought that was a knock right off the bat. Jalen Battles is Jalen Battles, man. That literally did not surprise me that he did that, not one bit. If another shortstop did that, it would surprise me, but Jalen Battles, absolutely not. The dude is an absolute big leaguer at shortstop, and he's been making plays like that all year. It's not surprising. But as a momentum standpoint, it was humongous. We came into the dugout screaming and fired up, the most hyped we'd been the entire game.

Then, boom, get it going. I think he put up a three-spotter, two spotter. I can't really remember. I'm sorry. That's what he does, man. That's what he does. That's why we're as good as we are.

Q. It was three runs. You said that you guys wanted to do this for Dave. What was the post-game like for him? What was that interaction like?

CULLEN SMITH: It was probably the most fired up I've seen him. The dude doesn't show too much emotion. I'm just glad we got that for him. I think he was fired up. I think all the guys were fired up. I think we know we've got a lot more to do. I think this is a stepping stone in what we wanted to accomplish this year -- regular season champs, not losing the SEC series, and now we sweep the SEC Tournament.

It's just another stepping stone for us. We want to win at Regional, Super Regional, and we want to win the National Championship. That's why I came here. That's why all these guys are here. Coach Van Horn knows that's the angle for us. He sure likes this one, though. That's for sure.

Q. With you being from Nashville, playing at East Tennessee, and Vandy and Tennessee are the big schools in that state, was there any extra fun to beat Vanderbilt and Tennessee to win this tournament for you? Had you faced these guys at East Tennessee State?

CULLEN SMITH: I have. I faced both teams at East Tennessee State. Not really. They're fantastic ball teams. Other than the fact that I want to beat the best teams in the country when we play them, but it doesn't matter. That's the thing about it us, man. It doesn't matter who's across the field from us. We're going to give you our best shot every single time. We're going to try to win every game we play.

I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't want Tennessee to beat us in the SEC Championship, that's for sure. I'm just glad we won it. This is a dream come true for me. I'm glad I chose to go to University of Arkansas, that's for sure.

Q. In this tournament, going 4-0 makes you 26-8 against SEC teams this year, 20-4 against teams in the top 25, the current poll. Speaking of beating the best, what kind of momentum does that give you guys and confidence going into the postseason?

CULLEN SMITH: Same momentum we've had all year, honestly. With this team, it's so resilient, and the attitude we have towards every game is no game -- you know, no game is bigger -- this game right here is the biggest game of the season. This game is the biggest game of the season. When you get into postseason play, that's actually how a lot of teams treat it, but we treat every single game like that.

We just know we're some dogs, man. We know we're the best team in the country for a reason. There's absolutely no doubt about that. We're ready to go get it. We're ready to give it our best shot, that's for sure.

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